The BOY TROOPERS ON DUTY

Clair W. Hayes

CHS-(72)C

Leston Wentworth Perkins

Christmas 1925.

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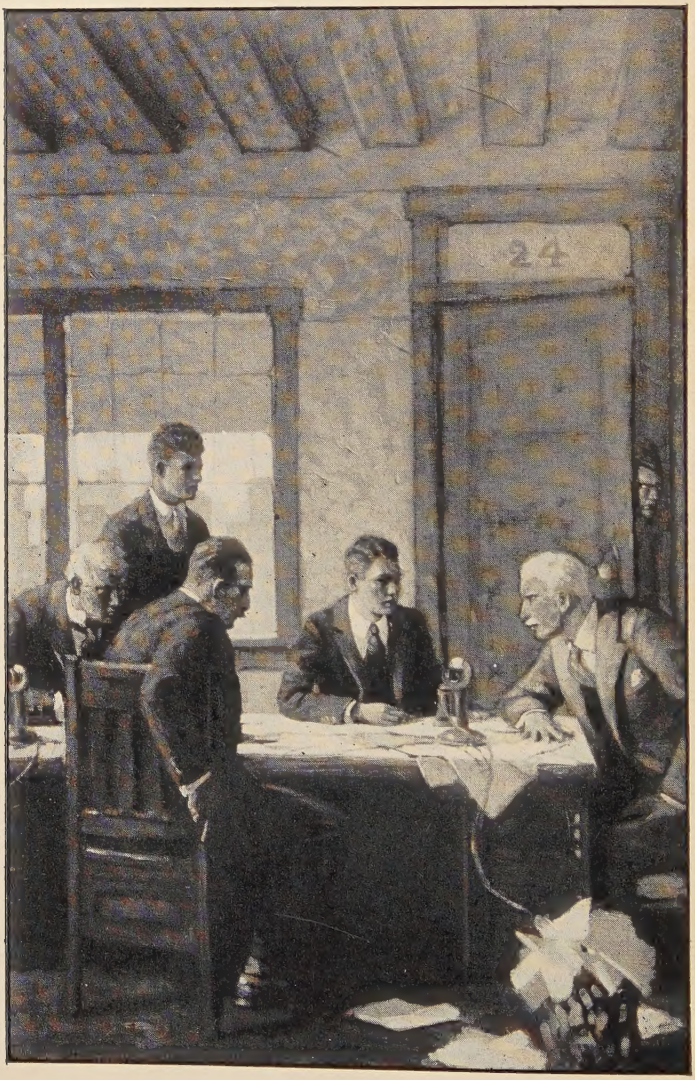

"We're under great obligations to you boys for putting us in possession of this information."

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THE BOY TROOPERS ON DUTY

By CLAIR W. HAYES

Author of

"The Boy Allies Series," "The Boy Troopers on the Trail," "The Boy Troopers in the Northwest," "The Boy Troopers Among the Wild Mountaineers."

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THE
BOY TROOPERS SERIES

A Series of Stories for Boys 12 to 16 Years of Age

By CLAIR W. HAYES

The Boy Troopers on the Trail
The Boy Troopers in the Northwest
The Boy Troopers on Strike Duty
The Boy Troopers Among the Wild Mountaineers

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THE BOY TROOPERS ON DUTY

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THE BOY TROOPERS ON STRIKE DUTY.

CHAPTER I.

A RIOT.

A STREET car, bound for Pittsburgh, was creeping slowly through the narrow streets of a suburb of the Smoky City. It was filled with nervous and frightened passengers, women and children among them.

Along both sides of the street surged a crowd of men, foreigners from the great steel mills of this suburb, which shall be called Wilmercairn. Until the day before, these men—or a good many of them, at least—had been apparently faithful employes of the Wilmercairn Steel Tube Company.

Today they were strikers—a small fraction of the steel workers in the Pennsylvania-Ohio-West Virginia Districts—who had joined a walk-out for more money and shorter hours. The total number of men on strike in these districts ran into the millions.

The fright of the passengers aboard the car that

now crept along the street was occasioned by the fact that among them was William Henry Zachary, general manager of the Wilmercairn Steel Tube Company.

When the general manager had left his office a short time before and emerged from the iron gates that surrounded the plant, he had been followed by a crowd of angry men, shouting and gesticulating violently.

Paying no heed to the threats that were hurled after him, Zachary walked several blocks to the car line and boarded the first trolley for Pittsburgh. The angry crowd followed him to the car, and now hurried after him.

"There he goes!" cried a voice.

"Get a rock!" cried another voice in broken English.

Others in the crowd took up the cry:

"Stone him! Stone him!"

For a moment, however, the crowd held off, while cooler heads ran hurriedly about attempting to quell the mob's turbulent spirit.

Chief among these was a young fellow of perhaps eighteen, himself a worker in the mill—a striker, but not of the pugnacious, or aggressive class.

"Hold on, men!" he cried. "Don't let's do anything we'll be sorry for! You'll have the constabulary on us if you're not careful; and besides, there

are women and children in that car and on the street, too."

It is probable that the foreigners, which comprised the bulk of the crowd, did not understand his words, and the rougher members of the English-speaking men in the crowd paid no heed.

As the motorman of the car threw the controller over farther and the trolley began to move faster, some one in the crowd hurled the first rock.

The missile passed through a window in the center of the car with a crash.

Instantly pandemonium broke loose.

Hoarse cries of encouragement went up from the street, while women and children in the car screamed.

A second rock was hurled, and then a third. This was followed by a shower of missiles.

The motorman lost his head.

A short distance away a crowd had gathered across the track. The motorman threw the controller over still farther and the car fairly leaped ahead.

The crowd ahead scattered. But for a moment it seemed that all would be unable to reach safety.

From a seat half way toward the rear in the speeding car a figure sprang forward, dashed through the struggling passengers in the aisle, leaped to the platform, sent the motorman spinning to one

side with a quick push, shut off the power and applied the brakes.

The car came to a stop almost upon the heels of two fleeing boys.

The motorman, recovering himself, turned upon the newcomer angrily.

"What—" he began.

"Never lose your head, my man," said the figure who replaced him. "It's the worst thing you can do in a place like this. Remember you have others depending upon you."

The motorman gazed at the other. He doubled his fists and took a threatening step forward.

"Why, you young whipper-snapper," he said. "I've a notion—"

"Then forget it for the present," said Dick Hazelton, brother of Tom Hazelton, of the Pennsylvania Constabulary, better known as "State Police," or "State Troopers," a youth of some seventeen or eighteen years. "You've enough else to think of right now, I should say."

The motorman looked back down the street.

The crowd, outdistanced a moment before, came forward at a run. Those who had almost been run down were also pressing forward now that they realized they had little to fear.

"You see," said Dick quietly, "those fellows think you deliberately tried to run down the people in front. It was only the foreigners you had to

contend with a moment ago. Now, I've no doubt, even some of the Americans consider you've committed an overt act and are likely to take a hand."

"But I didn't," the motorman protested. "I just—"

"I know! I know! But I doubt if they will let us explain. Likely there'll be real trouble."

The crowd was getting closer, brandishing sticks and stones.

"Tracks clear ahead," said Dick, at this juncture. "Guess we'd better make a run for it."

He stepped aside, the motorman resumed his place, released the brakes and threw over the controller.

The car did not budge.

"Trolley must be off," panted the motorman, and reaching for the cord gave the conductor, also on the point of panic, three bells.

"Go ahead!" the latter shouted back through the car. "Trolley's on all right. Hurry!"

Again the motorman tried to start the car. The effort failed.

"Power's off," he said nervously.

Passengers in the car were becoming more excited every minute. In vain cooler heads among the men tried to keep them quiet with assurances that they would not be molested—that the car would soon outdistance the mob.

Some leaped from the car and ran. These were

immediately pursued by a crowd of rougher foreigners, and in some cases severely beaten.

"Well," said Dick to himself, "I guess we're in for it."

He stuck his head in the car door and cried:

"Man the back platform, men! Don't let them get aboard. And some of you come out here. Tell the women and children to get down on the floor and not to raise their heads to a level with the windows."

One of the first to rush to the front platform was Zachary, general manager of the mill. In his hand he carried a heavy cane.

"Better give me that," said Dick.

Zachary looked at him in surprise.

"What for?" he demanded. "I guess I can use it as well as you can."

"Undoubtedly," returned Dick, "but the first time you use it there will be an awful roar go up from the crowd. You see, I know you, Mr. Zachary."

"Maybe you're right," grumbled Zachary. "But what shall I do?"

"Stand inside the door and try to keep 'em out if they get me."

Zachary took the position Dick indicated, meantime passing the lad his stick.

"You can't stop 'em," he protested.

"I can try," said Dick; "but first I'll see if I can't make them listen to reason."

Zachary shook his head.

"Too late, I'm afraid," he muttered. "If this fool motorman had just kept his head—"

"No use of talking about that now, sir," declared Dick, as he turned to the motorman who stood stupefied at his side.

"Here," said Dick, "can you fight?"

"Why," replied the motorman, "I—I—don't know. I never was much of a hand—"

"Well, you'll probably have to fight now or take a good licking," Dick declared grimly.

"But—"

"Be quiet. Here they come."

Dick stepped from the car, and placing his back against it, waited for the crowd to come up, which it did a moment later.

Somewhat awed by Dick's bold front, the leaders paused. Then the young fellow who, some time before, had tried to disperse the strikers, addressed Dick.

"Out of the way, there," he said. "We don't want to bother with you, but we're going to make an example of that motorman. Try to run down a crowd of people, will he?"

"Hold on now," said Dick raising a hand. "I want to tell you that you are mistaken."

"But I saw him," protested the other."

"It was an accident," said Dick quietly.

"That's a lie," said the young striker.

Dick's face turned red.

"If it wasn't that the women and children in this car are somewhat dependent upon me, you'd answer for that right now," he said.

"Pshaw!" said the other, "Is it because of the women and children or because you're afraid?"

Dick restrained himself with difficulty.

"I'll talk to you about that some other time, if you'll tell me where to find you," he said.

The young striker laughed shortly.

"Quite a bluff," he sneered. "Well, my name's Jerry Eagan, if you want to know. And anybody in Wilmercairn can tell you where to find me,"

"I'll find you, all right," declared Dick grimly. "But right now, I want to ask you to call off those men."

"I told you we want that motorman. And If we don't get him, it'll be the worse for everyone in that car."

Dick hesitated. Then he turned to the motorman.

"You see how it is," he said. "If you get off, they'll probably let the women and children alone. Are you willing to sacrifice yourself?"

"No! No!" cried the terrorized motorman.

"Well," said Dick, "I can't ask you to." He turned to the young striker. "I want to warn you," he said, "that you are making a serious mistake. It is not in such ways as this that you will win the strike."

"Rats!" said the young striker. "Is he going to get off, or must we come and get him."

Dick raised his stick.

"Come and get him!" he said defiantly.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIGHT IN THE CAR.

THE young striker, who seemed to have appointed himself leader of the mob, wasted no further time in argument.

"Get him, men!" he cried.

Half a dozen figures sprang forward.

Dick swung back to the car step as they advanced, and holding on to the handle with his left hand, laid about him lustily with his improvised weapon.

The crowd at the rear of the car, which had paused while Dick engaged the young striker, Eagan, in conversation, also sprang again to the attack.

Fighting at both ends of the car became fast and furious.

From within still came screams, as women stooped in the aisles and between the seats.

But, for the moment, no more rocks were thrown.

This, apparently, was because the members of the mob, not certain of their aim, were fearful of hitting some of their own men.

Gradually the defenders at both ends of the car were forced back, as Dick continued striking rapidly at figures as they scrambled up the steps. Then he found himself wedged in the door.

The boy set his teeth.

"Guess I'm a goner," he told himself as his arm continued to fly, "but I'll stick it out as long as I can. Where on earth are the police?"

A form sprang in beneath his arm, and seized his wrist, trying to twist the stick from his grasp.

"You would, would you!" shouted Dick.

He kicked out with his left foot. The figure before him gave a grunt of pain and toppled back in the arms of his fellows.

"Come, on!" cried Dick. "Some of the rest of you come in and see how you like it."

The five or six figures on the platform surged forward and Dick found himself the center of a struggling, shouting mass of humanity.

The fighting was at too close quarters now for Dick to do any effective work with his stick. He let go of his weapon, and sprang upon his foes with his fists.

The defenders at the rear of the car were having no better success. Gradually they had been forced

back until they were pushed through the car door.

The mob surged in behind them.

Hopelessly outnumbered, but fighting as best they knew how, those on the car realized that the struggle, unless help came from some now unexpected source, could have but one outcome.

Zachary, mill manager, was fighting at Dick's side. Between them they managed for a moment to clear a space in front of them; but suddenly Dick was sent staggering, as a heavy fist caught him a glancing blow on the side of the head.

As he ducked his head and lowered his guard to protect himself, an idea flashed through his head.

"It will be good strategy if it works," he muttered.

He straightened up and uttered a cry.

"The police!" he shouted. "Hurrah!"

With Zachary at his side he sprang forward.

At the lad's cry and the sudden onslaught, the men on the car platform gave ground. Then, turning, they leaped to the street.

Zachary, cheered by Dick's cry, looked quickly up and down.

"Where are the police?" he demanded.

"That's too deep for me, Mr. Zachary," replied Dick with a rueful grin.

"But you said—"

"I know I did. We had to have a little time, didn't we?"

Zachary looked at the lad in amazement.

"Well, I must say I don't think much of that as a joke," he said.

"Nor I," Dick agreed, "but if I hadn't done something, they would have overpowered us in another minute."

"You can't fool them like that. They'll return to the attack in a minute."

"Of course; but it gave us a little breathing space, didn't it? We'll be ready for them again when they come. Hello, somebody dropped your stick in his rush to be gone."

Dick stooped and recovered the weapon. Then once more he took his stand on the platform, ready for whatever might come.

Zachary eyed him admiringly.

"You're a smart youngster," he declared. "I'd like to talk with you at length if we ever get out of this."

"You'd better save your breath now, Mr. Zachary," said Dick. "Here they come again."

It was true.

With angry cries the mob returned to the attack on both ends of the car. Once more feminine and childish screams rent the air.

"We won't be able to fool 'em again, boy," said Zachary.

"You're right, sir," Dick agreed quietly. "We'll have to fight till we drop this trip; but I hate to think what may happen to the passengers inside the

car if they fall into the hands of this mob of foreigners!"

"They'll have to answer for it, you may be sure of that," declared Zachary grimly.

"Yes, but that won't help these poor people. Well, here we go again, sir."

Three men sprang for the car step together. Dick, smiling, stepped forward and brought down his stick twice in rapid succession. The first man released his hold on the car rail, and jumping back, wrung his fingers in pain. The second rolled off sidewise as Dick's weapon came down on top of his head, protected only by a thin cap, with a resounding whack.

Zachary stepped forward and accounted for the third man with a blow of his fist.

But others sprang forward in the places of their fallen comrades.

Beyond, Dick, out of the tail of his eye, could see young Eagan exhorting the more cautious of the rabble to renewed efforts.

"What!" cried Eagan. "You're not afraid of one man and a boy? Forward, men."

"Forward yourself," said a foreigner in the crowd. "Why should you hang back, hey?"

Eagan glowered at the man, but he took the hint.

"All right, I'll do it myself," he cried.

He sprang forward alone.

The mill manager stepped forward, but Dick stayed him with a word.

"This fellow's my meat," he said quietly.

Not willing to take an unfair advantage over the other, Dick stood his stick up alongside the door, and instead of waiting for Eagan to board the car, leaped lightly to the ground.

"Now I've got you!" shouted Eagan.

Dick smiled.

"I wouldn't be too sure," he said.

They came together.

Once again the attack on the car ceased, as the crowd gathered around to see this hand-to-hand encounter. Even the passengers for the moment forgot their terror and looked from the car windows.

Dick took in the situation at a glance.

"Now if I can just hold this fellow off," he muttered, "it will be better than ending the combat with a blow. But where on earth are the police? Surely they must have learned of the riot by this time. Oh, well, maybe they'll show up yet."

Dick shifted his head slightly, and Eagan's first furious blow passed harmlessly over his head.

Quickly the young striker brought his left up from his side and struck Dick a glancing blow on the chin.

Then he grinned at Dick as he stepped back and set himself for a second rush.

"Think you can fight, eh?" he taunted. "Well,

you won't think so when I get through with you."

Dick made no reply but prepared to avoid the other's rush; and when it came he had no difficulty in dodging the series of heavy blows.

Somewhat exhausted by his efforts, Eagan stepped back and cried:

"What are you afraid of? Why don't you fight?"

Again Dick just smiled at him.

This infuriated Eagan more than ever, and he rushed for a third time.

This time Dick did not step aside quickly enough, and Eagan caught him around the neck with his left arm.

Two hard rights to the face made Dick realize that his predicament was serious, and that if he didn't fight now he would be beyond fighting in a few minutes.

Making sure of his aim, Dick brought his left fist up heavily against Eagan's stomach.

The latter gave a grunt of surprise, and his hold on the lad's neck loosened.

Dick freed himself with a sudden twist.

"Now," he said, facing Eagan calmly, "I guess this thing has gone far enough."

Eagan stepped back in surprise.

He realized at once that Dick had not really been fighting before, and he seemed to understand the lad's purpose. A half smile spread across his face.

For a moment Dick feared that Eagan contem-

plated beating a retreat and calling upon his friends to renew their attack.

But Eagan stepped forward again.

"So you've been fooling with me, eh?" he exclaimed, and there was now malice in his tone. "Well, it's been a long while since anyone was able to fool with Jerry Eagan. Here I come again! Look out!"

This time he advanced more warily, and after a few moments of sparring Dick realized that he was facing a foeman worthy of the best he could put forward. Nevertheless, he had no doubt of the final outcome.

Both boys struck out heavily and more than once their fists found their mark. But Dick's lessons in the art of self defense had apparently been given by a more expert teacher.

Dick feinted sharply with his right, and again brought his left up in the pit of Eagan's stomach. Then, before his opponent could recover or raise his guard, Dick's right went to the point of his chin.

Down went Eagan in a heap.

"Get him, men!" cried a voice and the crowd surged forward once more.

But an interruption came from an unexpected source.

"Stop! Let that car alone," cried a deep bass voice.

Dick glanced around in surprise, for he recognized the voice on the moment.

Big Jim Henderson came elbowing his way through the crowd.

CHAPTER III.

TOM AND RALPH ARRIVE.

Big Jim Henderson!

Dick had not seen him for months. During the Christmas vacation Dick and his chum, Ralph Harkness, had encountered Big Jim in Canada where they had accompanied the former's brother Tom, of the Pennsylvania State Police, on the trail of an embezzler named Taylor. Returning from Canada Big Jim had left the others in Pittsburgh, announcing that he was going back to one of his old jobs in the steel mills. This was the first time Dick had seen him since, and it was now the first of June.

The crowd gave right and left as Big Jim pushed his way toward the stalled trolley car.

"What's going on here?" he demanded in his big voice. "Oho, it's you, eh?" he added as his eye fell upon Jerry Eagan. "Every time there is mis-

chief afoot I find you at the bottom of it. What's it all mean?"

"Why, Uncle Jim," said Eagan, "the motorman of this car tried to run down a crowd of men and women. We were just about to take him to task for it when this fellow," indicating Dick, "interfered."

For the first time Big Jim looked at Dick.

"May I be blasted if it ain't Dick Hazelton!" he cried, and stepping forward he seized Dick's hand in such a powerful grip that Dick winced.

"Hold on, Big Jim!" the lad cried. "I'm glad to see you again and all that, but I'd like to keep that hand, if it's all the same to you."

"Well, well, young feller!" said Big Jim. "So you're at it again, eh? Every time I see you, you're mixed up in a fight of some kind. Tell me what's the matter?"

Dick explained briefly.

When he had concluded, Big Jim swung about on the crowd which, though still gathered close about the car, was less hostile.

"Get out of here!" he cried, and dashing in among them he pushed them right and left.

There was a grumbling among some of the men thus roughly handled, but they apparently held Big Jim in a great deal of respect, for they slowly drew off.

Big Jim turned again to Dick.

"Young feller," he said in a severe voice, "weren't you fighting with my nephew here?"

"If you mean Eagan, I was," replied Dick, "but I didn't know he was your nephew."

"Then get acquainted," laughed Big Jim. "Jerry, this is one of the boys I was telling you was with me in Canada last winter. And so you had set out to lick him, eh? Ho! Ho!"

"Well," said Jerry sulkily, "I ain't sure yet I can't do it."

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Big Jim again. "Why, look at your face. You ain't got a chance with him, Jerry, not a chance."

Dick was forced to smile.

"Come now, Big Jim," he said, "it's not as bad as all that, you know." He turned to Jerry and held out his hand. "I have no ill feelings, Eagan," he said. "Will you shake hands?"

Jerry grinned sheepishly, but he shook the proffered hand.

"Sure," was all he said.

"Now," said Dick, "we'd better see if we can't let this car proceed."

The passengers, apparently, had all recovered from their fright and taken their seats. The motorman was experimenting with the power.

"All right now," he said as Dick approached him. "You certainly helped me out of a hole, son. I appreciate it."

Zachary, general manager of the mill, also approached and held out his hand.

"Come and see me some time," he said. "Maybe I can make you a proposition."

"Thank you, sir," replied Dick, "but I'm afraid I've a couple of years of school to put in yet."

"Well, come to me then," said Zachary. "I won't forget you if it's ten years from now." He turned to Big Jim and looked at him carefully. "Your name is Henderson, isn't it?" he demanded.

"It is," returned Big Jim shortly.

"I'm glad to see you are not one of the strikers, my man. If there is anything I can—"

"Hold on now, Mr. Manager," said Big Jim. "Don't get me wrong. I am one of the strikers, but I'm a peaceable striker like most of the others. Don't get it in your head we're all like these foreigners here. We're striking for our rights, and we're going to get 'em. Don't you forget that."

"You mean to tell me that you, an American, stand up for this rabble?" the general manager exploded.

"No, I don't mean to tell you any such things. But if you treated all your workers decently these things wouldn't happen. You know there are firebrands everywhere, Mr. Zachary, and there are just as many among your strikebreakers and guards as there are among the strikers."

"I've no time to argue with you, Henderson,"

said Zachary. "But if you fellows don't like your jobs you can quit. That's what I'd do."

"Maybe you would. But we don't want to quit. We like the work. But we want our rights."

"Well, we offered to compromise—"

"Compromise!" howled Big Jim. "Haven't we tried it? And what did we get? Nothing!"

"Well," said Zachary, "I can tell you one thing sure. You'll never get anything if you permit or countenance such actions as I have just witnessed."

He boarded the car, which was just beginning to move.

Big Jim stared after him.

"A good worker and a pretty big man," he said. "Funny he can't see things our way. And yet he's right with that last remark. Look here, Jerry," he swung on his nephew. "You're getting to be a pretty big kid; but if I ever catch you mixed up in any more of these so-called strike riots I'm going to take you across my knee."

"But we can't let 'em run over us," blustered Jerry.

"What's that?" demanded Big Jim. "Don't you talk back to me that-a-way, young feller. Now, I been around this country a whole lot and I know what I'm talking about. No good ever yet come of violence and bloodshed, and it never will. If these foreigners insist on stirring up trouble just because we are on strike, it's up to the good American work-

men to stop 'em. That's all I got to say about that."

"And you're perfectly right, Big Jim," declared Dick.

"You bet I'm right; but what are you doing here, young feller?"

"Why, Big Jim," Dick replied, "I'm on my way to the home of Ralph's Aunt, Mrs. Mary Whitcomb, at the far end of town."

"And where is Ralph?"

"I guess he's there by this time. He has been in Pittsburgh several days, and wired me to meet him here."

"I see. And how's your brother Tom?"

"Fit as a fiddle?"

"Around these parts now?"

"No. I left him in Harrisburg this morning."

"Well," said Big Jim, "I'll tell you something. It wouldn't surprise me to see him, and a whole lot more like him, around Wilmercairn before long."

"You mean—"

"That's exactly what I mean. Now, us fellers in the mills are striking for something we believe we are entitled to, and we're going to hold out till the last dog's hung as long as we've any chance of winning. Trouble is these foreigners. They're making it hot for all of us, and they ain't got started yet."

"But can't you put a curb on them?"

"Curb? Huh!" Big Jim sniffed. "They're an ignorant lot, let me tell you. They've come to this country thinking they can run it. Why, every blasted one was a-scared of his shadow over in the old country, I tell you; but the minute they light here they've got more nerve than a lot of brass monkeys."

"And the result, as I see it," said Dick, "is that they are hurting your cause."

"That's just it. These foreigners and the so-called strike sympathizers. Why, let me tell you, half the trouble—yes, more than half the trouble—blamed on the strikers is altogether the work of these sympathizers. Sympathizers. Why, they don't sympathize with anybody but themselves."

"Well, Big Jim," said Dick, "I can't stand here talking all day. I've got to be moving."

"I've nothing to do, not for some time," said Big Jim. "I'll go along with you. I'd like to see Ralph again."

"Glad to have you Big Jim. Will you come, too, Jerry?"

Jerry signified that he would, and the three walked off together.

It was only a short ways to the home of Ralph's aunt, and they covered the distance in less than fifteen minutes.

As Dick had expected, Ralph was already there. He was greatly tickled to see Big Jim again and

was greatly interested in the adventure Dick had just been through.

Ralph and Jerry seemed to take to each other right off.

After half an hour's stay, Big Jim and Jerry were about to take their leave, when a body of horsemen came down the street.

The others stopped to look.

As they drew closer, Dick gave an exclamation.

"Constabulary!" he exclaimed.

"I told you," said Big Jim with a slow grin. "Take it from me, Tom is likely to be here in a day or so."

"Well," said Dick, "if there is danger of riots the sooner they get here the better."

"Trouble is," said Big Jim, "you fellers won't be on my side this time."

"Oh, yes we will, Big Jim," said Ralph. "We are all on the side of law and order, you know."

But Big Jim shook his head and went off muttering down the street with Jerry.

"Well, Dick," said Ralph, "we seem to be in the thick of it again. I wonder if Tom really will be assigned here?"

"I wouldn't be at all surprised."

And, as it developed, Dick was right.

Tom arrived next evening to join the squadron stationed in Wilmercairn.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STATE POLICE.

While Tom, Dick and Ralph are discussing the steel strike situation in the Pennsylvania and neighboring fields, particularly in the Wilmercairn section, it will be a good time to introduce the three to such readers as have not met them before. Also it will be a good opportunity to say a word about the Pennsylvania State Police, than whom there is scarcely to be found a more efficient body of men in the United States today.

Dick Hazelton, a lad of between seventeen and eighteen, was just a few months older than his chum, Ralph Harkness. Both boys lived in Harrisburg, where they attended school. Both were well grown for their years and proficient in all athletic sports.

More than a year before this story opens they had won the title of the "Boy Troopers" by lending Tom and the Pennsylvania State Police a hand in rounding up a band of bank robbers. So valuable had been their services that both had won the praise of Captain Mahon, in charge of the Harrisburg district, and the governor of the state as well.

As a result of this service, the lads had been allowed to accompany Tom Hazelton to Canada during their Christmas vacation, when Tom was sent into the Dominion with extradition papers for the return of an embezzler. There, following the escape of the embezzler, they had again proved their worth to Tom, and themselves had recaptured the man after a chase extending clear across the country.

Once more they had won the praise of Captain Mahon, when Tom gave the captain an account of their services.

"You're a couple of fine boys," Captain Mahon had said upon their return. "Some of these days I hope to see you both members of the Constabulary. You're both going to make the kind of men I'd like to have."

Their Christmas vacation over, the lads returned to school.

At the time this story opens, school had just closed for the summer. Ralph had gone immediately to Pittsburgh to visit relatives for a couple of days, and from there to his aunt's in Wilmercairn, where he expected to remain possibly a week. There, as we have seen at the opening of this story, Dick joined him, though not without adventure.

Tom Hazelton, possibly five years older than Dick, had been a member of the State Constabulary for several years. He was considered one of the most efficient men on the force despite his short length

of service, and even now was being considered for promotion to a sergeantcy.

The Pennsylvania State Police for years has been the terror of evildoers in the Keystone state. It covers the commonwealth with a fine-tooth comb. No task is too difficult for it to undertake. Its members are to be found first here and then there, on trail of some lawbreaker or to put down more concerted lawlessness, such as steel and coal strike riots.

The sight of the grey uniforms for years has awed foreign-born trouble-makers as has nothing else; and it still does for that matter. Where strikers have fought with mine guards and national guardsmen, in few cases have strikers stood up before the state police.

Consequently, after the mob riot in Wilmercairn, which marked the day of Dick's arrival there, the town became quiet. While strike sympathizers in Ohio and West Virginia continued to terrorize the towns, the State Constabulary, mounted or afoot, maintained order in Wilmercairn and other Pennsylvania cities.

"The worst trouble in this strike," said Tom to Dick and Ralph the day following his arrival, "will probably come in Ohio or West Virginia. Of course, there may be some outbreaks in this state, but I feel we have the situation pretty well in hand."

"Say," said Ralph, "you state policemen certainly think well of yourselves, don't you?"

Dick grinned and Tom's face turned a trifle red.

"What do you mean, Ralph?" he asked.

"You know what I mean, all right. It strikes me that you fellows are just a bit swelled up."

"Nonsense," said Tom "we—"

"I agree with Ralph," Dick put in. "I'm afraid you're getting careless, Tom. It's liable to take something of a jolt to put you back where you belong."

"And you're likely to get it during this strike," Ralph declared.

"Think so?" said Tom sarcastically. "Let me tell you something. Every time these foreigners see a state police uniform coming down the street they give it a wide berth."

"I'll admit you've subdued them pretty thoroughly," Ralph declared. "But, as you say, they're all foreigners. Put a couple of Americans at their head, and given an equal number of men they're quite likely to put up an argument."

"Pshaw. No Americans are going to mix up with them," declared Tom.

"That's where you're wrong," said Dick. "Undoubtedly there are a lot of professional agitators circulating around this section. Give 'em time, and you'll hear from them."

"You kids make me tired," declared Tom. "Just because you've mixed in a couple of these rumpuses

doesn't signify you knew more than the entire force."

"It doesn't signify we don't, either," returned Dick grimly.

Tom turned to Dick wrathfully.

"You kids take the cake," he declared. "Guess I'll do my talking to myself after this. All you seem to think of is trying to stir me up."

"Doesn't take much to stir you, does it, Tom?" inquired Dick with a grin.

"Aw, shut up," said Tom, and stalked from the room.

"Where are you going?" Dick called after him.

"Barracks," returned Tom, meaning the temporary structure erected for his squadron several blocks from the big steel plant.

"Better keep one eye open," shouted Ralph. "Some of these foreigners may sneak up on you in the middle of the night, and—"

He broke off, for Tom was out of earshot.

Dick laughed loudly.

"Doesn't take much to roil Tom at that," he said.

"Poor old Tom," grinned Ralph. "He thinks he's so much wiser than we are that—"

"Ralph!"

The speaker was Ralph's aunt, Mrs. Whitcomb.

"Yes, aunt?"

"I've told you before you shouldn't speak that way of your elders."

"But Tom—" Ralph began.

"He's a man, nephew," said Mrs. Whitcomb, "and you are both only boys, you must remember."

"All right, aunt," was Ralph's answer. "But we didn't mean any harm."

"There, there, nephew. I know you didn't."

It was not until after dinner that evening that the lads announced their intention of walking down town, if such the business section of Wilmercairn may be called, and looking around a bit.

"May we go, aunt?" asked Ralph.

"Of course. But don't get into any mischief, and be sure and get in early."

"We'll be back by nine o'clock, Mrs. Whitcomb," said Dick.

They left the house and walked slowly down the street.

The great steel strike was now in its fourth day, and everything seemed peaceable enough. From day to day there had been talk of the men arbitrating their grievances with the mill owners, but for some reason all overtures looking to such arbitration had fallen through.

But despite the fact that on the surface everything seemed quiet, there were those who knew that things were smouldering. It would only take a spark to touch off the conflagration.

And there were evil-minded men in Wilmercairn who were preparing the spark.

From Youngstown, in Ohio, reports had filtered in of a pitched battle between strikers, sympathizers and loyal workers and steel mill guards. This, it was said, was occasioned by the fact that the mills there had been importing strikebreakers—some no better than gunmen, from the lowest spots in New York and other big cities.

There had been considerable bloodshed in Youngstown. State troops had been dispatched to the city, and officials were considering putting the town under martial law.

It was no more than natural that the sympathies of the idle mill workers in Wilmercairn should be with the Ohio strikers. There was talk on some sides of organizing a good sized band of men to arm and go to the assistance of the workers in Youngstown.

But fortunately this talk came to naught.

Nevertheless, as Dick and Ralph walked along the main street, they were conscious of an undercurrent of unrest. Something was in the air, and both lads seemed to realize it.

"Do you know, Dick," said Ralph, "I've a peculiar feeling that something is about to happen?"

"Strange," was Dick's reply, "but I have the same feeling myself."

"And still it looks peaceful enough," said Ralph.

In truth it did.

There were small knots of men grouped on the

street corners engaged in interested conversation. These, of course, were strikers, but there was nothing in their manner to indicate forthcoming trouble.

But these quiet knots tonight were gathered only in the American quarter of the town.

In the foreign section things were different.

There, too, men were gathered in little knots on the street corner; but these men were gesticulating violently. In several of these groups were to be found Americans—professional agitators—sent to Wilmercairn by lawless elements who hoped to profit by the strike.

These walking delegates were enlarging upon the supposed grievances of the foreign strikers.

After walking through the business section of the town, Ralph was for turning home, but Dick suggested:

"Let's go down and look around the plant first."

"Think we should?" asked Ralph.

"Oh, we've time enough. It's only a little after eight. We'll be home at nine without any trouble. Besides, everything is quiet. There is no danger."

"Well, it suits me," said Ralph. "It is a little early to be getting home."

They headed toward the darkened part of the city, beyond which lay the mills of the Wilmercairn Steel Tube Company.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLOT.

It was very dark in the foreign section of the town as the lads passed through. They walked on beyond to where the dim outline of the big steel plant,—its usually fiery blast furnaces dark now and the forges still,—reared itself in the blackness of the night.

Behind the iron fences the boys could see occasional forms as the guards hired by the management flitted from post to post, while outside occasional pairs of state troopers walked up and down.

"Looks quiet enough here," declared Dick, as they stopped for a survey.

"It certainly does," Ralph agreed. "Too quiet for a steel mill altogether."

"Well, there's nothing to see," Dick said. "Let's go home."

They turned to retrace their steps when Dick's attention was attracted by a figure that darted across the street and brought up closer against the iron fence.

"Look there," he said in a low voice, pointing.

But the figure had disappeared, and Ralph could not see it.

"What was it?" he demanded.

"It was a man," said Dick "and from the way he acted he had no business there."

"He's gone now, at all events," said Ralph.

"Yes, I guess—no! There he goes now."

Ralph turned quickly at Dick's cry. This time he saw the figure as it skulked along the fence, stooping so as to be as nearly invisible as possible.

"He's up to no good, that's sure," said Ralph. "What's that he's got in his hand."

"By Jove! Looks like a gun," Dick declared.

"That's what it does. Guess we'd better keep an eye on him."

Once more the lads turned and retraced their steps.

Stooping, as did the other figure, they stepped quietly after him. When the man stopped, the lads did the same.

"Here comes a guard, just inside the fence," whispered Ralph. "Our man will be seen if he isn't careful."

Almost as if in answer to Ralph's words, the prowling figure threw itself flat on the ground.

Dick and Ralph did likewise.

Then so suddenly that Dick and Ralph cried out aloud, there came a sharp report and the lads caught

a spurt of flame where the man they had been following lay on the ground.

Almost in the same instant the man leaped to his feet and sped away in the darkness.

"After him!" cried Dick.

Both lads dashed away in pursuit.

The fugitive turned and headed for the street that lay closest to the steel plant. Once he turned and glanced over his shoulder, but either he was so afraid or so careless, he did not see his pursuers.

At the edge of the street, he pulled up. So did Dick and Ralph, taking pains to keep out of sight.

"He hasn't seen us, that's sure," declared Ralph as they slowed down.

"No, I don't believe he has," Dick agreed.

"What had we better do?" Ralph went on. "I suppose he shot at that guard back there."

"Of course. Didn't you see him fall?"

"No."

"Well, I chanced to be looking directly at the guard."

"Then that's what he was skulking about for."

"Of course. Now my idea is, that if we can keep track of the assassin we may learn something that will be advantage to Tom and the others."

"Good idea. Of course they'll want to clear up this shooting."

"That's it. And we can do no good back there. Others must have heard the shot, and if the guard

is still living he'll get whatever attention is necessary."

"Then let's get a little closer to this fellow. He's likely to give us the slip in the darkness."

They increased their stride, until they were less than a hundred yards behind the fugitive.

The man did not pause in the foreign settlement, but passed on to the American quarter beyond.

"He's got his nerve with him," declared Ralph.

"He's taking the safest course, if you ask me," Dick replied. "If the police get busy the first place they'll look for an assassin is in the foreign quarter."

"Guess you're right."

"Hello!" said Dick suddenly. "There he goes into the drug store."

"Let's go in and have a closer look at him. He won't know we followed him from the mill."

The lads entered a small drug store just on the edge of the little business district. They went to the soda fountain and called for a drink. Then, for the first time, Dick looked around.

The lad gave a low whistle of surprise.

"What's the matter?" demanded Ralph, not looking around.

"See for yourself," said Dick guardedly. "He's not here."

Ralph glanced casually about. Then, draining his glass, he replaced it quietly on the fountain.

"Now what do you think of that?" he demanded.

"Something queer about it, that's sure," said Dick. "But let's get out of here before we arouse suspicion."

They left the store, walked half a block after rounding the corner, then stopped.

"Well," demanded Ralph, "what's the answer?"

Dick shrugged.

"Ask me something easy," he replied. "I'm no clairvoyant."

"Tell you what," said Ralph after a pause, "maybe he has accomplices in the back room."

"By Jove! I believe you've hit it," exclaimed Dick.

"Then let's go back and have a look?"

"And let 'em spot us? That would be foolish."

"Maybe we can peek in a rear window."

"Guess it's worth trying. We might be able to see something, although if they are conspirators in the back room they'll certainly take pains to pull down the curtains."

"Think you'd know the man if you saw him again, Dick?"

"I certainly should. Not by his face, because I didn't get a look at it. But if I ever see that slouching walk I'll recognize it in a minute."

They proceeded cautiously to the rear of the drug-store, where they perceived a single window.

"Shade's down," said Ralph disappointedly.

"So it is, but I hear voices," said Dick. "Now I

wonder if they can have been foolish enough not to close the window?"

They investigated closer.

The window, they perceived, was down, but just beyond this they found a small door. It was through this that the voices came.

"You stand here and keep guard, Ralph," Dick whispered. "If you hear anyone coming, whistle. I'm going to see if I can get a look through the keyhole."

"Better be careful," Ralph cautioned.

"I'll be careful, all right."

Dick slippepd into a little entry-way. There the sound of voices came plainly to his ears.

"You're sure you got him?" asked a voice in English.

"Certain. I don't miss often, Bill."

"I know that, but you might have done so this time."

"Well I didn't. Now tell me, do you think this one shooting will be enough to stir things up?"

"Do I? Of course it will. The next striker that walks within shooting distance of that mill is going to draw a shot. And that's just what we want. Things are too all-fired quiet here. But let those guards shoot one striker, and you'll see how fast things begin to move."

"But the constabulary—"

"Pshaw! What's the constabulary? It's highly overrated, if you ask me."

"Maybe so, but these foreigners—"

"They'll do what we tell 'em from now on. Haven't we done our best to convince 'em we'll stick to the finish—that the state troops are too few to stand in their way?"

"Wish I could be as positive as you are."

"Don't get cold feet. Now we'd better separate, and we'll lie low until we hear some striker has been shot or something. Then I'll meet you here."

"All right. So long."

Quickly Dick slipped from his precarious position, for there was a possibility that one of the two men inside might come out the rear way. He clutched Ralph's sleeve as he hurried past, and they darted across the street.

"Keep your eye on the back door there," Dick cried, as he walked a few yards away so he could watch the front entrance.

A moment later he whistled.

Ralph came to him.

"There goes the man who fired the shot," said Dick, pointing to a figure that left the drug store and moved off at a heavy slouching gait.

"Looks like him," said Ralph. "What now?"

"We'll see where he goes."

They followed the man two blocks down the

street. There the assassin boarded a car headed toward Pittsburgh that chanced to be passing.

Dick and Ralph sprinted but the car speeded up and left them behind.

"Tough," exclaimed Dick, "but there is no help for it."

"And we've lost the other one, too," declared Ralph.

"So we have." Dick looked at his watch and whistled. "Your aunt will be pulling our ears, Ralph," he said. "It's after nine, but we can't go home now."

"Can't, eh? Where are we going?"

"Why, we're going to hunt up Tom, of course, and tell him what we've seen."

They headed for the emergency state police barracks.

CHAPTER VI.

SETTING THE TRAP.

Tom received the lads' tidings, at first, with incredulity.

"You mean to tell me you know the man who shot the guard!" he exclaimed. "Why, the shooting occurred less than an hour ago."

"No, we don't know who the assassin is," was Dick's reply. "We've seen him, that's all."

"And you'd know him again, eh?"

"I think so."

"By the way, Tom," said Ralph, "is the guard's wound dangerous?"

"Dangerous?" repeated Tom. "Why he's dead."

"No! You don't mean it!"

"He is, though. Now you boys come with me and repeat your story to Sergeant Jewett, who is in command here."

Sergeant Jewett was greatly impressd with the lads' story.

"We'll have to round those fellows up before they can do any more mischief," he declared. "Trouble is we don't know where to find them.

"We know their rendezvous, though, sergeant," said Tom.

"It's my belief that the proprietor of the drug-store is in cahoots with them."

"It seems more than likely," the sergeant admitted.

"Then why not raid the place?"

"We haven't any proof. While these boys might identify the man who fired the shot, they can't connect the druggist with the crime."

"That's true enough, sir," Ralph put in.

"But if there is a rendezvous like that in town it should be cleaned out," declared Tom.

"I guess you're right on that score, Hazelton. Certainly we can't wait until some one else is shot before acting."

But the situation settled itself.

While Tom and Sergeant Jewett were discussing ways and means of conducting the raid, a trooper was admitted to their presence.

"What is it, Phillips?" asked the sergeant.

"Striker just shot by one of the mine guards, sir," said the trooper.

Tom, Dick and Ralph could scarcely believe their ears. Sergeant Jewett was no less surprised.

"What's that you say?" he demanded.

Phillips repeated his statement.

"Dead?" asked Tom.

"Yes."

"Have they arrested the guard?"

"Yes, they have, and locked him up in the police station."

"Confound it, this is serious!" exclaimed Sergeant Jewett. "This second shooting will do more to inflame the strikers—particularly the foreigners —than anything that could have happened."

"It's more serous than that, sir," declared the trooper. "Already the word has flashed through the foreign quarter and there is talk of lynching."

"You don't mean it! But surely they understand it is only the result of the death of the guard."

"The strikers don't seem to know much about that, sir."

"So they are talking of lynching the prisoner, eh?" mused the sergeant. "By the way, who arrested him?"

"I did, sir. I wasn't a dozen yards away when he fired at the man through the fence. I covered him and he surrendered without argument."

"Why didn't you bring him here?"

"Because the jail was closer and a crowd was gathering."

"I see, and where is the crowd now?"

"It was headed toward the jail when I came to report to you, sir."

"Any Americans in the crowd?"

"Yes, sir, perhaps a dozen, all professional agitators, I should say."

"What's the chance of the local police holding out against them?"

"Very little, if they really mean business. There are only the sergeant and three or four officers in the jail."

Sergeant Jewett wasted no further time in talk.

"Call the men, Hazelton," he said sharply. "We've no time to lose."

Tom hastened to obey, and five minutes later the little squadron of state police, probably fifteen all told, were assembled before the barracks.

"We won't need our horses, men," said Sergeant

Jewett, after he had explained the situation, "and I guess that for the time being the guards will have to look after the plant. We'll have to lend a hand at the police station."

"One minute, if you please, sergeant," said Tom. "How about the possibility of the man who killed the guard and his companion returning to the drugstore rendezvous?"

"That's so," said Sergeant Jewett. "It had slipped my mind."

"I don't think, sir," said Dick, "that they will be back tonight. As I told you, one of them has gone to Pittsburgh and will hardly return before morning."

"Guess you're right, youngster," said the sergeant. "We'll be ready for him then, and his companion, and the druggist. Right now we'd better hustle for the police station."

The troopers moved off with the sergeant at their head.

"Guess we'd better go along, hadn't we?" asked Dick of Ralph.

Ralph grinned.

"Why not?" he demanded.

Accordingly they followed behind the troopers.

As they drew near the jail they heard the grumbling of the rapidly gathering mob. Men were moving toward the jail from all directions.

"Forward men, or we'll be too late," exclaimed Sergeant Jewett.

The squadron broke into a trot.

Ralph and Dick kept close behind them.

Before the little jail the mob had paused. As they came close Dick and Ralph saw what had halted them.

Two police officers stood at the door with drawn revolvers.

"Go back," shouted one of the figures, who, Ralph made out a few moments later, wore sergeant's stripes. "Don't come any closer. We mean business."

"Give us the prisoner! Give us the prisoner!" came the cries from the crowd.

As the state police drew still closer a man on the edge of the crowd caught sight of them.

"The State troopers!" he cried.

The crowd scattered.

A moment later the troopers were among them.

"No shooting, men!" cried Sergeant Jewett. "Out clubs, and use them if you have to!"

Three minutes later, with Dick and Ralph in their wake, the troopers ascended the steps of police headquarters. Then, for the first time, Tom noticed Ralph and Dick.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "Why didn't you go home where you belong?"

"We wanted to see the fun, Tom," was Dick's reply.

"Now you listen to me," said Tom severely. "This is none of your affair. You get out of here and go straight home."

Dick started to protest, but the look in Tom's eye told him his brother meant business.

"Well, all right," he said, "but I think—"

"Never mind what you think. Get out of here."

Ralph and Dick, still grumbling, started to descend the steps. As they did so, a rock whizzed by the former's head.

"Duck, Dick!" he cried.

Dick did so and just escaped a second missile.

Quickly the lads turned and scrambled up the steps again.

Tom, who had not noticed their reason for returning, hastened forward.

"Didn't you hear what I said?" he demanded. "Don't let me speak to you again. Hurry, now, and go home."

"But we can't Tom," Dick protested. "When we started just now someone tried to bump us off with a couple of rocks."

"That so?" asked Tom quickly.

"Yes, it is. They'll grab us sure if we go out there."

Tom sighed.

"Confound it, you're always in the thick of things," he exclaimed. "I don't see why."

At this moment Sergeant Jewett hurried up.

"You boys can't stay here," he said. "The mob is growing ugly, and I'm afraid they mean to attack us."

"But we can't get away now, sir," declared Dick. "We started to go a moment ago and drew a shower of rocks."

"Well, get inside the station then," ordered the sergeant. "Here, men, half a dozen of you guard these steps. Hazelton, take three men and man the rear windows. The local officers will guard the windows in front. The rest of us will attend to the basement entrance. You're in charge here, Hazelton."

The men hurried to the posts assigned them, and Dick and Ralph made their way to the local police sergeant's room upon Tom's command.

"Now you stay there, too," Tom enjoined them.

In the sergeant's room it was impossible to see what was going on, so for some moments the two boys did not know what was transpiring without.

They could hear the muttering of the crowd as it steadily increased in numbers. The muttering gradually grew until it almost reached the proportions of a roar.

"Listen to 'em!" said Dick.

"I hear 'em," Ralph replied quietly. "Seems to me they mean business, too."

"But they'd be foolish to rush the troopers," said Dick. "They'd be shot down in their tracks."

"Maybe so," said Ralph, "but if they're urged on by professional agitators, they're likely to risk it. Besides, they could do a lot of damage by a concerted rush. They outnumber the officers ten to one, and the probabilities are that most of them are armed."

"That's so. Well, I hope it doesn't come to fighting."

"Getting nervous, eh?"

"No, I'm not getting nervous, but if they ever start shooting nobody knows where it is going to end."

"Well, I'm afraid you're not going to get your hope. I believe there is going to be a fight."

Ralph proved a good prophet. The words had scarcely left his mouth when a shot rang out.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SIEGE.

"That settles it!" cried Dick excitedly. "Now I know there'll be a fight."

Both lads listened intently.

For a space there was no more shooting. Even the voice of the mob was hushed.

But the momentary hush was only the calm before the storm.

Suddenly the voice of the mob rose louder than before. In the room next to them the lads heard a smashing of glass.

"They're stoning the windows!" cried Ralph.

The crash was followed by a series of scattered shots, plainly from without the building.

"Wonder why the police don't fire back?" muttered Ralph.

But Dick knew why the fire of the mob was not returned.

In all situations the state troopers were under orders to preserve the peace without resort to firearms unless the latter became absolutely necessary to save their own lives.

"But they will fire if this doesn't stop," Dick told himself.

Outside, the troopers defending the front door had stepped inside and closed and bolted the heavy door. They stood in the wide hall ready for whatever might transpire.

Sergeant Jewett hurried up from the basement to see how the situation was upstairs. He nodded in satisfaction as he noted the positions of his men behind the front door.

While he stood there a shower of thundering blows was rained on the door.

"If the door gives they'll come with a rush, men," said the sergeant quietly. "If they come through fall on them with your clubs, but don't fire except to save yourselves."

He departed to make a survey of other parts of the building.

The pounding on the front door continued.

Now the room in which Dick and Ralph found themselves faced on a little areaway seldom used. The windows to the room were not barred.

Dick and Ralph were standing in the door looking out upon the hall. Suddenly there was a creaking behind them. Both lads turned abruptly, and Dick uttered an exclamation of alarm and dashed forward.

For through the window came two men, and the lad saw the shoulders of several more behind them.

For the moment both lads forgot to cry out for help, but dashed forward to drive the intruders back.

Neither was armed, but as Dick passed the sergeant's desk he picked up a heavy paperweight and hurled it at the closest man with unerring aim.

The man clapped a hand to his forehead and crumpled up on the floor with a groan.

Meantime, Ralph had closed with the second man.

Others were climbing in through the window, but as yet were unable to go to the assistance of their friend. Dick sprang to Ralph's aid.

The man had Ralph by the left wrist and was swinging a heavy blow, when Dick let him have it behind the ear with his right fist. The man swung around, and as he did so Ralph freed himself with a jerk. Then he stepped close again, and putting his left foot behind his adversary, shoved hard with his right arm.

The man tripped over the lad's leg and went to the floor with a thud.

The two lads turned just in time to meet the advance of four other men who dashed across the floor toward them.

"Back to the wall, Dick!" cried Ralph.

Shielding themselves from the blows of the newcomers, the lads backed across the room until their shoulders touched the wall. And there they stood, fighting off their opponents as well as they could.

But fighting against such odds could not last long. They were bound to be overpowered.

"We can't keep this up," gasped Dick, as he struck a man heavily in the face with his right.

"I should say not," Ralph panted, as he too timed a blow successfully.

"Then let's make a rush for the door," said Dick.

The lads threw caution to the winds and darted in among the foreigners, striking out right and left.

For a moment the enemy gave back, and it seemed the lads would reach the door safely.

But suddenly a man stepped forward and cracked Ralph a heavy blow on the forehead.

Ralph fell.

With a cry, Dick turned his face from the door and safety and dashed back toward his friend. Straddling Ralph's body, his eyes flaming, the lad fought off his foes single-handed.

The men closed in on him.

Then, for the first time, it came to Dick that there was assistance in the room beyond.

"Tom!" he shouted. "Help!"

A figure crossed the threshhold with a bound. It was not Tom, but Dick recognized the newcomer instantly.

It was Phillips of the state police.

Phillips sprang into the knot of men surrounding Dick and laid about him lustily with his club. And for a moment he cleared a space about them.

Dick stooped and lifted Ralph's head to his knee.

Ralph stirred.

"Hurt much, old man?" asked Dick.

Ralph opened his eyes and looked around. A moment later he remembered where he was, and staggered to his feet.

"No, I'm all right," he said, shaking his head the better to gather his wits. "But that fellow hit me a terrible whack."

Into the room darted two more state troopers, and the enemy rushed for the window through which they had so recently come.

The police waded in among them with their clubs and three men were placed *hors du combat* before the room was finally cleared.

Then Phillips turned to the boys.

"Close call," he said briefly.

"You came just in time," Dick agreed. "I couldn't have held out much longer. How are things progressing elsewhere?"

"They haven't got in yet, and I don't think they will. In fact, some of them have drawn off. The building is still surrounded, though. It looks like they figured on laying siege to the place."

"Siege?" repeated Ralph.

"What good would that do 'em?"

Phillips shook his head.

"Too deep for me," he replied, "but they must have something up their sleeves."

He walked across the room and threw open a drawer in the local police sergeant's desk. Producing a pair of revolvers, he gave one to each lad.

"We're short handed, as you know," he said, "so I guess we'll have to impress you into service."

"Glad to lend a hand," returned Dick.

"Same here," Ralph agreed. "I'd like to get even for that whack on the head."

The boy was so plainly sincere, that Phillips was forced to smile.

"Don't know that I blame you much," he said. "Guess I'd feel the same way in your place. But now listen. So far we haven't fired into the mob. But the time has come, I believe, where we can take no more chances. You boys stay here and guard that window. The first man that tries to come in, shoot him. I'll take the responsibility.

"All right," said Dick. "No one will come in here. I'll guarantee that."

"Good. Then I'll leave you here."

He turned to his fellow troopers.

"Come on, men," he said.

They stamped out of the room.

Dick and Ralph took seats across the room out of the line of possible fire from the window, but where they themselves could cover it easily with their newly obtained revolvers.

"Hope we don't have to shoot," declared Dick.

"Well, I don't want to shoot anybody, and that's a fact," Ralph agreed, "but I'd certainly like to get my hands on the fellow who thumped me over the head."

Dick grinned.

"Hurt?" he asked.

"Hurt?" Ralph chortled. "Maybe you think it was a love tap."

"Not from the way you went down," was Dick's reply.

"Well, you ought to be glad it was me that got it instead of you."

"I am," said Dick grimly. "It certainly would have laid me out for keeps. As it is, it's a wonder he didn't break his hand on your cranium."

Ralph glared at his chum.

"Think so, do you?" he replied. "Well, I want to tell you my head is no harder than yours."

"That's what you think. Now I reserve a right to my own opinion."

Again Ralph glowered at Dick.

"Think you're funny, don't you?" he growled.

"Not I," said Dick, "but if you could have seen the way you toppled over you would have laughed yourself."

"Go ahead, keep it up if you're having a good time," said Ralph. "I don't mind."

"Ha! Ha!" replied Dick. "So you did get peeved, eh?"

Before Ralph could reply, had such been his intention, Phillips again entered the room.

"More trouble," he said. "Your brother wants to see you in the hall."

Ralph and Dick passed out the door, leaving Phillips on guard. They walked up to Tom, who stood talking to Sergeant Jewett. Tom greeted them with a nod.

"We've got a little work for you," he said.

"What is it, Tom?" demanded Dick.

"Well," said Tom. "As you see, the mob has drawn off. We've just captured a prisoner who told us why. Somehow or other they've laid hands on a couple of machine guns which they are going to turn on us. Now we're not strong enough to keep them out many hours, I'm afraid. Will you and Ralph undertake to sneak out, elude the mob and bring Sergeant Dougher and his men from McKeesport?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THROUGH THE MOB.

Dick and Ralph stared in pure amazement at Tom's words.

"Machine guns!" the former exclaimed.

"Exactly," was Tom's reply.

"Then they certainly do mean business," declared Ralph.

"Of course they mean business," interjected Sergeant Jewett. "Who said they didn't."

"But—" Ralph began.

"No buts, now Ralph," interrupted Tom. "The question is, will you undertake this task or not?"

"Why of course," said Dick. "But why don't you phone?"

Tom smiled sarcastically.

"Do you suppose we haven't thought of that?" he asked.

"Well, why don't you?"

"Somebody has cut the wires," replied Tom. "There isn't a line running out of this building."

"But don't you suppose somebody else has sent word? Some of our friends on the outside I mean?"

Tom shrugged.

"I can't say as to that," he replied.

"You see," said Sergeant Jewett, "we can afford to leave nothing to chance. Of course, somebody may have sent word, and then maybe they haven't."

"I see," said Ralph.

"Come," said Tom impatiently. "You say you are willing to undertake the work. Don't stand here talking all night."

"The sooner you get started the better," said Sergeant Jewett.

"Then we'll go at once," said Dick. "Come, Ralph."

"Hold on," said Tom. "How do you figure to get out of here without the strikers knowing who you are?"

Dick grinned.

"Leave that to me," he said. "Just detail me a couple of men for a few minutes, will you?"

"Of course," said Sergeant Jewett, but—"

"Remember we must hurry, sir," Dick interrupted.

The sergeant's face turned red, but he said no more.

"Here Atkins," he called; and you, too, Lord. Go with these boys and do whatever they tell you as long as you don't leave the building."

The men approached.

"Ready, Ralph?" asked Dick.

"Sure, but what—"

"Then follow me."

Dick led the way into the desk sergeant's room, where Phillips still stood on guard.

"How close are they?" Dick asked of Phillips.

"The strikers, you mean?" asked the trooper.

"Yes."

Couple of hundred yards, I should say. They don't seem bent on coming any closer, but appear to be out there for an all night stand."

"Listen Phillips," said Dick. "My friend and I have got to get out there in such a manner as to make the strikers think we are of their number. Understand?"

"Yes, but—"

"Now, we are going to crawl out the window," Dick went on unheeding the interruption, "and you and your fellow troopers have got to help us."

"Glad to, if you'll just tell us how."

"Well, when we start climbing out, you fellows set up a racket. Fire a shot or two. That will draw all eyes to us. Then we'll drop to the ground and run. You stick your heads out the window and make some more noise. That will convince the strikers, I'm sure. You may draw a couple of shots, but you'll have to risk that."

Phillips smiled.

"Good idea," he said. "Say the word when you're ready."

"We're ready now," said Dick.

He led the way to the window and laid a leg over the sill.

Immediately Phillips and the other troopers set up a loud din. The former drew his revolver and fired three shots in the air.

Dick, mindful of the risk he ran in spite of the deception he was practicing, dropped to the ground. A moment later Ralph came down beside him.

"Now run as if your life depended upon it," whispered Dick.

He suited the action to the word.

Ralph dashed away at his heels.

Phillips and his two companions stuck their heads out the window.

"Halt or I fire!" cried Phillips.

Twice more he fired as the lads ran on.

Ahead, Dick saw figures advancing toward them.

"They're coming to give us a hand," he exclaimed to Ralph.

Ralph nodded as he ran but made no reply.

Two or three shots were fired at the window by the strikers, but whether they found their mark neither lad could tell. They were in hopes that the shots went wild, but they could not risk turning around to see.

A moment later they dashed into a group of strikers, most of them foreigners. There were several American faces among them, however.

"Thanks!" gasped Dick. "They would have had us if you had not come to our aid."

"What's the trouble?" demanded one of the Americans gruffly.

"Trouble?" repeated Dick. "Why didn't you see us when we went in there a while ago?"

"We saw some of the men go in, and we heard sounds of a struggle. Most of the attacking party came out a few minutes later. We figured the ones who remained behind had been captured."

"Three or four were," said Dick. "But we managed to hide. When the troopers left the room we figured it was a good time to sneak out. But just as we reached the window they came back. Then we had to run or surrender. We ran."

"So I see," said the American, "and you're right when you say they'd have got you if we hadn't come up. What are you going to do now?"

"Going home," said Dick dryly. "We've had enough excitement for one night. But, tell me, have the men given up the attack?"

"No," said the American with an imprecation, "they've gone after a couple of machine guns. When they arrive we'll see how long the police can hold us off. We're going to lynch that murderer."

"I heard that one of the strikers shot one of the guards first," said Ralph, as they walked along. "Is that true?"

"No, it's not true. That's a story framed up by

the steel officials to make us appear in the wrong."

"Well, I didn't know," Ralph went on, "but if it is true it seems to me they're just as much in the right as we are."

"Well, it's not true. Take my word for it. But you're safe enough, young fellows. I'll leave you here. So you won't stick around and see the fun, eh?"

"I guess we've had enough excitement for one night," was Dick's reply. "Besides, mother will be uneasy."

"We may come back, though, if we hear the machine guns in action," Ralph added.

"All right. Suit yourselves, but I wouldn't miss it for a whole lot."

The group that had surrounded the two lads as they moved away from the police station broke up now, and the lads continued through the scattered crowd unmolested.

"Well, it worked," said Dick in high glee.

"It did. But I wasn't sure it would when we started," returned Ralph.

"Neither was I, but it was the only plan I could hit any of those fellows in the window when they fired over our heads?"

"Hard to say. I hope not. But what now?"

Dick drew out his watch, struck a match and looked at it.

"Great Scott! It's after eleven o'clock," he ex-

claimed. "I'd no idea it was so late. We'll hunt the nearest telephone and try and raise Sergeant Dougher in McKeesport."

At a corner store Dick got central on the wire.

"Sorry," the voice came back, "but I can't get a line out of town."

"You can't?" Dick exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know. All the wires seem to be down. We're trying to locate the trouble now."

Dick replaced the receiver and reported the conversation to Ralph.

"All cut, I suppose," said Ralph.

"That's my idea?"

"Well, what's the next step?"

"Guess we'll have to go to McKeesport."

Get a machine, eh?"

"Well, we can make almost as good time on the street car. One leaves here in five minutes. We can catch it if we hurry."

"It will take twenty minutes," said Ralph.

"I know it; but it will take longer than that if we have to go hunting for an automobile."

"Let's hurry then."

They covered the short distance to the car tracks in short order.

"There's the car," said Dick, pointing.

"About ready to go, too," declared Ralph. "We'd better hurry."

They broke into a run.

They reached the car before it started. It was half filled with passengers.

Dick and Ralph climbed aboard.

A moment later, the conductor gave the motorman the bell, and the car moved forward.

As it did so three men came running toward it. The car, making a half turn, showed their faces to Dick as the headlight flashed across them.

The first man was the one to whom they had talked after their escape from police headquarters. He was waving his hands frantically for the motorman to stop.

The latter shut off his power and was about to apply the brakes.

Dick reached the front platform in two leaps. With a quick shove he sent the motorman spinning across the platform, and himself threw on the current.

"Hey!" said the motorman. "Those men want to ride, and this is the last car tonight."

"I don't care what they want," said Dick grimly. "I've got to get to McKeesport without delay, and I don't intend to be stopped by those fellows. Here, take your place and keep this car moving."

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN.

RALPH now appeared on the front platform.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" he demanded of his chum. "You jumped out here like the Old Boy himself was after you."

Dick waved an arm toward the rear.

"Our striker friend who so kindly helped us escape from headquarters was headed this way," he replied.

"Oh!" exclaimed Ralph. "And you think he was after us, eh?"

"I don't know whether he was or not. I didn't wait to find out."

"It's just as well to be on the safe side," Ralph agreed.

The conductor, attracted by the commotion, came out on the platform and demanded the cause of the trouble.

"You know there's a strike on, don't you?" inquired Dick.

"Yes, but—"

"Well, the strikers are besieging the police sta-

tion. I'm on my way to McKeesport for help. Men we just passed wanted to stop us, but I prevailed on the motorman not to wait for 'em."

The motorman, who was still grumbling, changed his tone at this.

"You sure took a queer way of prevailing on me," he said with a grin. "Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

"Didn't have time," replied Dick. "You seemed so afraid those fellows wouldn't get aboard that I had to act promptly. And you're about the first motorman I ever saw who cared whether would-be passengers got on or not."

The motorman grinned again, but did not reply.

The conductor returned to the rear platform.

"I hope you won't waste any time on the way," said Dick to the motorman.

"No more stops than I can help," replied that worthy. "This is my last trip and I'm as anxious to get to McKeesport as you are."

Dick and Ralph re-entered the car and sat down.

The car seemed to fly along the rails. Two stops were made to take on or discharge passengers before the lights of McKeesport came into view.

"Where do you suppose we'll find Sergeant Dougher?" asked Ralph.

"I don't know," was Dick's reply. "We'll go to police headquarters. They'll know."

Consequently the lads alighted almost at the end

of the line, and quickly walked the one block to the police station.

"Who's in charge?" asked Dick of an officer seated at a desk in an office labeled "Chief of Police."

"I am," replied the officer. "What's the matter with you son?"

"I'm looking for Sergeant Dougher of the State Police. He's stationed here some place," said Dick.

"And who are you?"

"I'm Dick Hazelton. I've just come from Wilmercairn. Strikers are besieging the police station there and I've come for help."

The police officer sprang to his feet.

"You don't say!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't they phone?"

"Wires cut," replied Dick briefly.

The police officer, who introduced himself as Lieutenant Skelley, hurried into an adjoining room, motioning the lads to follow him. There he addressed a man at a desk sharply.

"Get the wagon!" he said.

Two men hurried out the room and the lieutenant and the two boys followed them.

Just outside headquarters stood the police patrol. Lieutenant Skelley climbed in the front seat with the man who was to do the driving.

"Climb in behind," he instructed the boys.

"But there are not enough of us here to quell the strikers," Ralph protested.

"I'm going to take you to Sergeant Dougher," the lieutenant explained. "Hop in."

The boys followed the third policeman into the wagon, which immediately started off with a lurch.

Five minutes brought them to their destination, an emergency barracks thrown up by the state police just outside the city's largest steel plant. There they were accosted by a trooper.

"Where's Sergeant Dougher?" demanded Lieutenant Skelley.

"Sleeping."

"Then call him. It's important."

Sergeant Dougher arrived a few minutes later in response to the summons.

"How are you, lieutenant?" he said. "What's the trouble."

"Riot at Wilmercairn," replied the lieutenant. "Here, son, tell him about it."

Dick did so in as few words as possible.

The moment the lad ceased speaking, Sergeant Dougher turned to the trooper who had called him.

"Get the men out at once," he ordered sharply.

The trooper hurried away to obey, and Sergeant Dougher addressed Lieutenant Skelley.

"Lieutenant," he said, "it would take us an hour to get there horseback. Can we borrow the patrol?"

"You certainly can, sergeant, and the driver as

well. He knows the roads. We'll get along somehow without the wagon."

"Thanks. And will you take charge of our work here for the time being?"

"Sure thing. I'll get the men on reserve duty. Fortunately, the strikers in the mills here are all behaving."

"We'll try and be back early in the morning," said Sergeant Dougher. "If we can't make it I'll wire for other state police to be sent here."

"I'll do my best, sergeant."

"Good!"

He turned to Dick and Ralph.

"Going to stay here, or want to go back?" he asked.

"We'd like to go back with you, sir," said Ralph.

"All right. Climb along toward the front there. Here come my men."

The troopers, strapping on their revolver belts as they hurried forward approached the wagon.

"Trouble at Wilmercairn, men," said the sergeant. "We're going there. Pile in."

The men scrambled into the wagon. Dick counted them. There were an even twenty. They crowded the patrol, big as it was, and some were forced to stand on the rear step.

Each man carried a service rifle, and a revolver swung in a holster at his side.

Sergeant Dougher sprang to the driver's seat. The machine sped forward.

As the patrol wagon bumped along the rough streets, the men discussed the situation at Wilmercairn. They had no details of the trouble, and they now sought information from the two lads.

Dick and Ralph explained as well as the jolting of the wagon would permit them to talk.

"Machine guns, eh?" said the man nearest Ralph. "That means we'll take 'em by surprise, providing the machine guns are not already there."

"The strikers were awaiting their arrival when we left," Ralph replied.

"And you say you were discovered aboard the car?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Then they may be ready for us when we arrive."

"It's possible," Ralph agreed.

"Did you tell Sergeant Dougher that?"

"No."

"Then I'd better do so. He may deem it necessary to enter the town from another direction."

Despite the swaying of the patrol as it bounced along the road—they were beyond the city now—the trooper stepped across his companions' feet, and raising his voice explained what he had learned to Sergeant Dougher through the cage bars.

"All right, Jordan," Sergeant Dougher shouted

back. "We'll detour at the crossroads, and come into the town from the North."

Conversation in the patrol languished from this time on. There were occasional snatches of talk, but for the most part the men were silent thinking of the struggle ahead.

Suddenly, seeming hardly to slacken speed, the patrol turned to the left and lurched off the main highway.

"Crossroads!" shouted the man next to Ralph.

"Right," Ralph called back. "We're getting close."

The big patrol seemed to take the turn on two wheels. The troopers on the off side were hurled across the laps of those on the other seat, while two of the men clinging to the rear rail almost lost their foothold.

But there was no grumbling from the men.

Dick leaned closer to the man on his left.

"Suppose we'll go direct to headquarters?" he said.

"I don't think so," was the trooper's reply. "We'd probably get through the mob all right, but once inside we'd be in the same situation as those besieged now."

"I hadn't thought of that," Dick confessed. "Then what do you suppose Sergeant Dougher will do?"

"Probably run through the mob in the wagon,

then stop at an advantageous point in the hope of catching the crowd between two fires."

"I see," said Dick. "That will give the men in the station a chance to make a sortie."

"Exactly."

"We must be almost there," said Dick after a moment.

"We must," the trooper agreed. "It's only five or six miles, and we must be going more than thirty miles an hour."

"We've been going all of that since we got out of McKeesport," Dick declared.

"Lights ahead," interposed another trooper at this juncture.

"Must be Wilmercairn," said the man with whom Dick had been conversing.

The patrol wagon slowed down to half its former speed. Dick and Ralph heard Sergeant Dougher as he called to his men:

"Rifles ready, boys. If they've planted those machine guns we'll have to take 'em at a single rush. We can't afford to give 'em time to turn 'em on us."

The blinding glare of the automobile searchlight was turned on full power. Ahead Dick saw the mob. Even as he looked there came to his ears the sound of rapid firing.

"Machine guns!" the lad exclaimed in alarm.

CHAPTER X.

A PITCHED BATTLE.

Reinforcements for the men besieged in the Wilmercairn police station had arrived none too soon. The machine guns for which the mob had been waiting before renewing the attack had been placed in position fronting the station only a few moments before the patrol from McKeesport swung into view.

The two guns were planted directly in the middle of the street and were surrounded by an excited throng, each member of which felt perfectly safe as long as the guns were able to play upon the station house.

Turning down the street, the patrol wagon headed straight for the guns, and it was plain even to Dick and Ralph, inexperienced though they were, that it was Sergeant Dougher's intention of running them down.

"Ready to jump men!" the sergeant shouted over his shoulder.

Then the automobile was upon the guns and the crowd.

The driver threw on the brakes, and the patrol stopped almost in its own length, its nose resting against the closest machine gun.

"Out men and seize the guns!" cried Sergeant Dougher.

He leaped to the ground followed by the patrol driver.

The men poured out the rear of the patrol and dashed forward, Dick and Ralph in their midst.

The machine gunners, who had fled as the police patrol seemed on the point of running them down, now dashed forward again in an effort to man the guns before the troopers could turn them upon their erstwhile owners.

In the struggle that followed, both guns were overturned and trampled upon by the struggling figures to such extent as to render them unfit for further use.

Gradually the mob began to draw off. As it did so shots began to fall upon the police from the windows of houses that lined the street.

"Quick men! Follow me!" shouted Dougher.

He dashed rapidly toward an open doorway directly across the street from the police station.

His men poured in after him.

"Man the windows!" cried the sergeant.

Dick and Ralph, who had sought shelter in the house with the police, sprang forward with the others.

"Some of you upstairs!" cried Sergeant Dougher.

Dick and Ralph found themselves rushing up the steps with half a dozen men. The troopers flung open the windows, and kneeling, thrust out their rifles.

Even as they did so, Dick and Ralph, looking over their shoulders, saw Sergeant Jewett, closely followed by Tom and others of the besieged, throw open the door and dash out.

Now in retreating, the mob had gone in both directions. Consequently its strength had been split. Part of it was to the north and part to the south of the police station. State police, from both sides of the street, held the center.

Nevertheless, urged on by the few agitators, some of the strikers and sympathizers held their positions and fired scattering shots at the men who now rushed out to seize the overturned machine guns.

Realizing that victory was now within his grasp, Sergeant Dougher ordered his men to the street again. There they were reinforced a few moments later by the full strength of the besieged. Sergeant Jewett at once took command.

"We've got 'em on the run!" he cried. "Dougher, take your men and chase 'em up the street to the left there. I'll clear the other end."

As the troopers advanced, the spirit of the mob, maintained up to now by the agitators, seemed to break. The crowd scattered and fled at full speed.

For a block in either direction the police gave chase, and then at command of Sergeants Jewett and Dougher, retired to the vantage point before the police station.

Sergeant Jewett and Sergeant Dougher met in the middle of the street.

"You got here just in time, Dougher," said Sergeant Jewett, taking his brother trooper's hand.

"I guess you're right, Jewett. But we wouldn't have been here if it hadn't been for those kids. By the way, where have they gone?"

The two men glanced around.

They saw Dick and Ralph standing a little apart from the troopers talking to Tom. Sergeant Jewett raised his voice, and the three came forward in response to his command.

The sergeant shook hands with them.

"We owe a lot to you boys," he declared. "But for you there is no saying what might have happened."

"Glad we were able to help out, sir," said Dick blushing, "but we did nothing more than any of your men would have done sir."

"Possibly not," Sergeant Dougher interposed. "But I take it Jewett here felt he was unable to spare any of his little force and that it was you boys or nobody."

"Quite right, Dougher," said Sergeant Jewett.

"And they certainly made a good job of it," Ser-

geant Dougher went on. "I don't think I am saying too much when I say that the thanks of the entire force are due you, young men."

"Not a bit too much, Dougher," declared Sergeant Jewett.

"Well, Jewett," said Dougher. "I guess the back of the mob has been broken. I don't anticipate you'll have any further trouble in maintaining order."

"I don't believe there will be another concerted attack like this," Sergeant Jewett agreed, "although there may be isolated instances of lawlessness."

"I'll keep my men here till morning, at any rate," said Sergeant Dougher. "Then we'll have to hustle back. News of this affair will undoubtedly be all over McKeesport in the morning, and strikers and sympathizers there are likely to get restless if they learn my force has been withdrawn."

"Can't be too careful," Sergeant Jewett agreed.

Posting several men around the police station as sentinels to give warning of a possible repetition of the attack, Sergeant Jewett ordered the others into the police station.

"We'll stay here the rest of the night," he said. "I don't consider another attack on the jail likely, but it's just as well to be on the safe side. We'll return to barracks near the steel plant in the morning."

Sergeant Dougher's men went in with them,

where they made themselves as comfortable as possible for the rest of the night.

Tom, relieved from active duty for the night at his own request, took Dick and Ralph aside.

"I guess you've had enough excitement for one night," he said. "You'd better lie down on those rugs over in the corner and get a little sleep."

But Ralph shook his head.

"We've got another job on hand before we can go to sleep," he said gloomily.

"You have!" exclaimed Tom. "Well, you kids listen to me. You do as I tell you and get some sleep. You can't go traipsing around town any more tonight."

Ralph grinned.

"I'd like to stay well enough," he replied. "But this job has just naturally got to be attended to."

"Well, what is it?" demanded Tom.

"It's not so simple as it sounds, either," Ralph went on.

"Come on, then, let's hear it," said Tom impatiently.

"We've got to go home and face Aunt Mary," said Ralph.

Tom burst out laughing.

"Why, confound it!" he exclaimed. "I thought it was something serious."

"Serious?" repeated Ralph. "Let me tell you

it's a whole lot more serious than sneaking through that mob a couple of hours ago."

"What—"

"Trouble is, you don't know my Aunt Mary very well," said Ralph.

"But Great Scott!" Tom protested. "After she knows what you've done this night—"

"Makes no difference. Aunt Mary is a stickler for a fellow keeping his word, and the last thing Dick said before we left the house was that we'd be back by nine."

"Oho!" said Tom. "Well, I'm glad you boys have some one who can make you stand around. It's too much a job for me. But aren't you afraid to walk through the town at this hour after all that's happened?"

"We'll hear enough as it is," was Ralph's reply, "but if we stayed out all night we never would hear the last of it. Aunty would probably pack us off home in the morning. And we don't want to go until we see those conspirators rounded up tomorrow, do we Dick?"

"I should say not," was Dick's reply.

"Look here," said Tom, "now you take my advice and keep out of this business in the future. True, you got through safely tonight, but you're likely not to be so fortunate next time."

"We can take care of ourselves, Tom," declared Dick.

"That's all right. I'm not disputing it. But what will I say to father and mother if you get hurt? They'll blame me for it."

"There is no use arguing it, Tom," said Dick. "We're here on a visit to Ralph's aunt and you're here on duty. I guess we can manage to keep out of your sight."

Ralph grinned.

"That's telling him, Dick," he exclaimed.

"Is that so?" said Tom angrily. "Suppose I write a letter home and tell father and mother the situation here? How long do you think it would be before they are after you."

Dick changed his tone.

"I say Tom! Don't do that!" he exclaimed.

This time it was Tom's turn to grin.

"You see, I hold the upper hand after all," he said. "But if you're real good boys and keep out of mischief, I won't do it."

"Let's let it go at that, Dick," said Ralph, pulling his friend by the sleeve. "He's too easily stirred up. He's liable to change his mind."

The boys took their leave of Tom, Sergeants Jewett, Dougher and the others, and went out into the night.

"Now for home," said Ralph, and added with a wry face," and Aunt Mary. You can bet she'll be waiting up for us."

CHAPTER XI.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

It lacked a few minutes of eight o'clock in the morning when Dick and Ralph, both sleeping soundly after their night adventure, were aroused by a knock at their door.

Ralph sat up sleepily and rubbed his eyes.

"What is it?" he called.

The reply came in his aunt's voice.

"Tom Hazelton and two other state policemen are downstairs and want to see you right away," she said.

"Tell them we'll be right down," was Ralph's reply.

Ralph leaped to the floor and pulled the sheet off Dick, who had snuggled down in bed and was preparing to go to sleep again.

"Get up out of there," he cried.

"What's the matter?" asked Dick, sitting up.

"Tom and some of the troopers are downstairs. They want us to come right down."

"Wonder they wouldn't let a fellow sleep," Dick grumbled. He looked at the clock on the mantle-

piece and added: "We haven't been in bed six hours."

"Never mind," said Ralph. "It must be something important or they wouldn't be around so early. Get your clothes on."

The lads washed and dressed quickly, and went down to the parlor where they found Tom, Sergeant Jewett and the trooper named Phillips.

"Hello, youngsters," Sergeant Jewett greeted them. "Sorry to bother you at this hour, but we've come to ask your assistance again."

"That's all right, sir," said Ralph. "It's time we were up."

"You are certainly entitled to a long rest after what you did last night," declared the state police sergeant, "and I wouldn't have bothered you if it weren't absolutely necessary."

"Glad to help in any way we can, sir," said Dick. "What can we do now?"

"It's about the man who killed the guard," Sergeant Jewett explained. "I believe that it's more than likely he will return to the rendezvous this morning."

"I wouldn't be surprised, sir," Ralph agreed. "He's probably heard all the news by this time."

"Exactly," said Sergeant Jewett, "and I hope to round him up, together with his fellow conspirators. You see, the trouble is none of us would know him

by sight, but I believe young Hazelton here says he would."

"I'm sure I would, sir," Dick declared.

"Then that's why I want you boys to come along with us."

"We'll be glad to go," said Dick. "Will you start right away?"

"As soon as you've had a bite to eat."

"Breakfast can wait," declared Ralph. "We're not so hungry we can't attend to business first."

"No, no," Sergeant Jewett protested. "I've discovered that men and boys both give better results on a full stomach."

"Besides," Tom put in, "there is really no great hurry. I don't believe the conspirators will gather before nine or ten o'clock."

"All right, then," said Ralph. "We'll eat. Come on, Dick."

They passed into the dining room, where Aunt Mary even then was placing two cups of hot coffee on the table.

"Sit right down, boys," she said. "There are hot cakes, and I'll have your eggs ready in a moment."

"Don't put yourself out, aunt," said Ralph. "Anything will do for me. This coffee and these cakes are really all I want."

"I don't care for much either, Mrs. Whitcomb," said Dick.

Despite their protests, however, the eggs soon made their appearance and the boys stowed them away without difficulty.

Draining his second cup of coffee, Ralph pushed back his chair and got to his feet.

"Now for business again," he said.

The boys returned to the parlor, and a few moments later left the house with Sergeant Jewett, Tom and the trooper Phillips.

"Are you going direct to the drug store, sir?" asked Dick.

"I am," replied Sergeant Jewett grimly.

"You mean you're going to arrest the proprietor?"

"Exactly."

"But we have no evidence against him," Ralph put in.

"We'll get the evidence later," said the sergeant.

"But I didn't know you could do that," Dick interrupted.

Sergeant Jewett smiled grimly.

"There are a lot of things we can do that are not exactly according to regulations," he said. "I don't think, from what you boys have told me, we'll be going far wrong in this case."

"Not far, sir," Ralph agreed.

"By the way," said Sergeant Jewett, "what's the name of this drug store?"

"Allen's Pharmacy," replied Ralph.

"Run by a man named Allen, I take it?"

"Yes, sir. Alton Allen is the proprietor."

"Very well. Then it will give me pleasure to put Mr. Allen under arrest."

"On what charge, sir?" asked Dick.

"Conspiracy."

"I see. But how about the other plotters? Won't they be frightened off when they fail to find him there?"

"We'll have to risk that, but I guess it can be managed all right."

The five were now approaching the drug store.

"Hazelton," said Jewett, "you and Phillips stay outside and keep your eyes peeled for possible trouble. I imagine I can handle Allen myself; but I'm going to let the boys go in with me. I reckon they'd like to see the fun."

"We sure would, sir," declared Dick eagerly.

Sergeant Jewett smiled.

"There won't be any excitement," he said, "so I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

The three left Tom and Phillips just outside the store and went in. There were two persons in the place. One a man of perhaps thirty-five and the other a boy of possibly seventeen,—the later the soda fountain clerk.

Sergeant Jewett approached the man.

"I'm looking for Alton Allen, the proprietor of this store," he said quietly.

To the lads it seemed that the man gave a start, but he was calm enough when he replied: "I'm Mr. Allen."

"All right, Mr. Allen," said Jewett, "you are under arrest."

"What's that?" exclaimed Allen, in well stimulated surprise. "Under arrest? What for?"

"Conspiracy," replied Sergeant Jewett quietly. "Conspiracy to foment trouble in this steel strike."

"But that's absurd," cried Allen.

"Maybe so. However, I'll take a chance on that."

"Who makes this charge?"

"I do, Sergeant Jewett of the State Police, on information furnished by two persons whose names you will learn at the proper time and place."

"But—"

"Talk is useless, Allen."

Sergeant Jewett produced a pair of handcuffs.

"Must I use these, or will you come peacefully?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll come peacefully enough, but I warn you, you are making a terrible mistake, officer," sputtered Allen, his face white.

"I'll have to risk that."

Allen turned to the boy behind the fountain, who was eying the proceedings in wide-mouthed amazement.

"George," he said, "you look out for the place till I get back. Call up Mr. Fitzpaptrick for me,

will you? Tell him I'm in trouble and want him to bail me out."

"You can save yourself the trouble, Allen," said Sergeant Jewett. "Fitzpatrick nor anyone else is going to bail you out for a few days."

"But you can't deny me bail!" Allen protested. "It's not legal."

"Maybe not, but I'm going to put you where you won't be found for a few days. It will save a lot of trouble. I'm going to ship you to Harrisburg for safe keeping."

Again Allen opened his mouth to protest, but Sergeant Jewett stopped him with a gesture.

"Enough!" he said. "I've heard enough out of you. I can't waste time. I've other work to do. Step out the door ahead of me."

For a moment, it appeared to the lads, Allen debated whether to resist. But if such was his intention, he thought better of it when Sergeant Jewett again produced his handcuffs.

"I'll go quietly, officer," he said.

He stepped out the door with Sergeant Jewett and the boys close behind him.

"Hazelton," said Sergeant Jewett to Tom, "take this man to the barracks, turn him over to Randolph and tell Randolph to start for Harrisburg with him on the next train."

Tom saluted and took charge of the prisoner.

"The rest of us are going to stay here," the ser-

geant continued. "When you've disposed of the prisoner come back. We'll be around here some place."

Tom marched his prisoner away.

"Now," said Sergeant Jewett, "to prepare for the other conspirators."

"How, sir?" asked Ralph.

"Easy," was the sergeant's reply.

He led the others into the store, and spoke to the boy behind the counter.

"You're through for the day, son," he said.

"But Mr. Allen," the boy began.

"Never mind, Mr. Allen," said Sergeant Jewett. "Move, son."

The boy discarded his white coat and disappeared through the door.

"Now, Harkness," said Sergeant Jewett to Ralph, "you put on that white coat and get behind the fountain. Phillips, you and young Hazelton come with me," and he led the way toward the rear of the store.

"But what am I to do, sir?" called Ralph.

"Why," said Sergeant Jewett, "you're just there for the sake of appearance and to tell the conspirators everything is all right when they arrive. When they start for the back room, whistle."

Ralph nodded that he understood, and Sergeant Jewett, Phillips and Dick disappeared in the room at the far end of the store.

"I guess it's all right," Ralph told himself, "but I hope no one comes in and wants a drink from this fountain. I'm not much of a soda jerker myself."

CHAPTER XII.

NEW FRIENDS.

RALPH, in white jacket and without his cap, surveyed himself in the glass behind the fountain.

"Well, I look like I worked here," he told himself, "but I don't think much of the job. Wonder what some of the boys would say if they could see me now?"

He investigated the mechanism of the fountain.

"Guess I might as well make myself at home and have an ice cream soda," he said.

He dished out the ice cream, squirted in the flavoring and added seltzer.

"Not so bad," he said, after tasting the mixture. "Guess I'll apply for a job as soda clerk some of these days if I can't find anything else to do."

He finished his soda and rinsed out the glass. As he did so, he glanced toward the door. Two young girls, possibly sixteen years old, were just coming in.

Ralph felt himself growing nervous.

"Oh, my!" he ejaculated under his breath. "I'm in for it now. But maybe they only want a tooth brush or something.

But he was doomed to disappointment. The girls headed straight for the fountain.

"Look at the new clerk, Ethel," said one.

The girl addressed as Ethel giggled.

"I don't think I'll like him as well as George, Mabel," she said.

They drew stools up to the counter, and Mabel called: "Two chocolate milk shakes, please."

Ralph's face grew red.

"Wh—what's that?" he asked.

"I said two chocolate milk shakes, please," replied the girl; "and hurry, won't you?"

"A—all right," said Ralph, and added under his breath: "Now how the deuce do you make a chocolate milk shake?"

He hesitated a moment, and was on the point of telling the fair customers that a chocolate milk shake was beyond his knowledge. But he changed his mind.

He recalled having seen milk shakes made in drug-stores before now.

The lad took two large glasses and poured in a quantity of liquid chocolate. To this he added eggs and milk.

"There should be a mixer around here some place," he told himself.

He looked along the counter behind the fountain, and drew a breath of relief. He saw the electric mixer at the far end of the counter.

Ralph placed the big tin cup, into which he now poured the mixture, in its proper place and pressed what he took to be the button that started the device.

He drew another breath of relief when he found he had guessed right.

He let the mixer work for half a minute, then stopped it. Then he produced fresh glasses, into which he poured the drinks.

He set them on the counter before the girls with something of a flourish.

"There you are," he said.

The girls helped themselves to straws from a little stand on the fountain, and proceeded to drink.

Then the one called Ethel threw down her straw with an exclamation.

"Br-r-r;" she cried. "What on earth is it?"

Mabel also pushed her glass away and cast a reproachful look at Ralph. Then she answered Ethel's question.

"He just thinks he's smart, Ethel," she declared. "He knows very well we can't drink this concoction."

Ralph was taken aback. He had, he thought, done himself proud in making the drinks.

"What—what's the matter with them?" he asked.

Mabel got down from the stool and stamped her foot.

"You know what's the matter with it," she replied. "I don't."

"But, I assure—" Ralph began.

"You don't need to apologize," declared Ethel. "It's too late for that now. Where's George?"

"George?" repeated Ralph. "George who?"

"Why, George Hamilton."

"I don't know anyone named George Hamilton," was Ralph's reply. "Who's he?"

Again Mabel stamped her foot.

"You know very well who I mean, you fresh thing," she said. "I mean George Hamilton, who worked here as soda clerk until today."

"Oh, yes," Ralph stammered. "George Hamilton, of course, I didn't understand you at first."

"Then you certainly must be foolish," said Ethel. "Then you do know George?"

"Oh, yes, of course," replied Ralph, at a loss what else to say?

"Then where is he?"

"Why—why, he went out."

"You don't need to tell me that, stupid. Don't you think I can see?"

"Well, I don't know just where he went," Ralph

confessed. "But he'll probably be back tomorrow."

"Thank you," said Ethel. "Come, Mabel, we'll be going. I guess he won't expect us to pay for those things he served as chocolate milk shakes."

"Let me make you some more," Ralph begged. "Maybe I can do a better job next time."

"No, thank you," said Mabel firmly. "I don't believe I would care to take another chance."

She moved toward the door. But Ralph was determined she should not get away before he explained.

"Look here," he said hurriedly, "I'll admit that as a soda clerk I'm a failure. You see, it isn't my regular line of work. I just happen to be here for a little while."

"Oh," said Ethel, "you mean you are just relieving George for a little while?"

"That's it," grinned Ralph, "although not at George's request exactly."

The girls looked interested. Mabel perched herself back on the stool. Ethel followed her example.

"Won't you explain more fully?" asked Mabel.

Ralph was embarrassed.

"I'm sorry, but I can't," he said. "Why I'm here is somewhat of a secret. I may be able to tell you later, but not now."

Mabel jumped quickly from her stool.

"I think you're mean," she declared.

"So do I," Ethel agreed. "It's my opinion you don't know George at all; now do you?"

"Well, no, not exactly," Ralph admitted.

"And you won't tell us what you are doing here?"

"Of course I will," said Ralph.

"Then what?"

Ralph grinned. He was sure of himself now.

"Why, I'm tending this soda fountain," he said.

Ethel tossed her head.

"Well, I'm not going to stay here and talk to you," she said. "Come Mabel, let's go."

Again they moved toward the door. They were about to pass out when they stepped back to let a third figure enter. Both girls greeted this figure with expressions of pleasure.

"Oh, Harry, we're glad to see you," said Mabel.

"Glad to see you girls, too," was the newcomer's reply.

Ralph looked him over. He was a lad about his own age.

"Where are you going, Harry?" demanded Ethel.

"Well, I was just about to have a soda. Won't you join me?"

Ethel turned up her nose.

"Not in this place," she declared. "There is a new clerk on the fountain and he's the freshest thing. Isn't he, Mabel? You should have seen what he gave us when we asked for chocolate milk shakes."

"Fresh, is he?" said Harry. "Well, you girls come back with me. I'll guarantee he won't be fresh again."

Not giving the girls time to reply, he advanced to the fountain and facing Ralph said:

"Give us three chocolate milk shakes at once, my friend, and see that you have them just right."

Ralph's face turned a dull red. He placed both hands on the fountain and learned forward.

"What's that you said?" he demanded in a low voice.

But the youth called Harry failed to heed the warning in Ralph's eyes. He repeated his demand.

With a single leap Ralph was over the fountain, and had the other by both arms.

"Never talk to me like that," he said. "Get out of here before I throw you out."

Harry gave one long look at Ralph, then slunk toward the door, calling to the girls as he did so:

"Come on, girls, we don't want anything to drink in this old store, anyhow."

But the girls failed to take the hint. Instead, Mabel walked right up to Ralph and said frankly:

"You treated him just right, and I'm glad of it. Harry seems to think that just because his father is president of the Wilmercairn Steel Tube Company he can talk to anyone as he chooses. I was glad to hear you talk up to him. What's your name?"

Ralph told her and she then introduced herself as Mabel Lovitt and her chum as Ethel Bancroft.

"But you don't live in Wilmercairn, Mr. Harkness?" questioned Ethel.

"No. My home's in Harrisburg."

"I thought so. Now my—"

Ralph's attention strayed from Ethel as two men entered the front door. They walked directly up to him and scrutinized him closely.

"You're a new boy, aren't you?" asked one. Ralph nodded. "Where's Allen?" the man demanded.

Ralph jerked his head toward the back room. The men walked in that direction. The lad felt sure that these were two of the conspirators. He gave a long whistle, then turned to the two girls who still stood near, with a sharp command.

"Get out," he said abruptly. "There is likely to be trouble."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRUGGLE.

"QUICK!" cried Ralph, as the two girls hesitated.

"But—" began Mabel.

"I haven't time to talk now," said Ralph, "but if you'll leave me your address I'll call tonight and tell you all about it."

Mabel made as though to draw a pencil from her pocketbook, but Ralph stopped her.

"No time," he said. "Tell me the address. I'll remember it."

"Eight Sixteen Fifth street," she said.

"All right," said Ralph. "I'll bring my friend with me. But now hurry out, please."

He took the girls by the arms and escorted them through the door.

Wondering what it could all be about, Mabel and Ethel crossed the street and stopped, where they glued their eyes to the store.

The moment the girls were out of the store, Ralph turned and darted toward the back room.

Dick and the others, after adjourning to the rear room and leaving Ralph as an ostensible soda clerk, made themselves comfortable around a small table they found there. They paid no attention to what was going on outside, and consequently knew nothing of Ralph's adventure with Mabel and Ethel.

They were discussing the events of the night before in low voices, when they heard Ralph whistle.

"There they come," said Dick in a low voice, and jumped to his feet.

"They may not be the ones we're looking for," said Sergeant Jewett, "but we'll grab 'em first and ask 'em about it later. Phillips, you and Hazelton get on the other side of the door."

All three took their places. Footsteps came toward the door and a hand turned the knob.

The door swung outward, and this fact shielded those crouching close to the wall beyond. The men stepped through the door.

As they did so, Sergeant Jewett stepped forward with levelled revolver.

"Hands up!" he cried sharply.

The men halted in surprise, and the man nearest the sergeant slowly raised his hands.

Not so the other, in spite of the fact that Dick and Phillips now advanced toward him.

He gave an angry cry and dodged beneath Phillips' arm. As he did so Dick sprang forward and endeavored to throw both arms around him.

But the latter eluded him.

Phillips raised his revolver.

"Halt or I fire!" he exclaimed.

But the man paid no heed. Instead, he dashed straight for the rear door, drawing a weapon as he did so. He laid a hand on the knob and twisted it, then drew back with a growl.

The door was locked.

The man wheeled and in spite of the fact that Phillips had him covered pulled the trigger of his revolver.

Phillips threw up his arms and toppled to the floor.

Again Dick sprang at the man and again the lat-

ter eluded him. Sergeant Jewett, taking in the situation out of the corner of his eye, wheeled and fired. But his bullet went wild.

In his effort to bring down the second man the sergeant had played into the hands of the man he had covered.

The latter sprang forward and grappled with him.

Meantime, the man who had eluded Dick sprang through the door toward the store. But a figure in the doorway barred his path.

It was Ralph.

The lad was not armed, but realizing the seriousness of the situation he determined to try a bluff.

"Drop that gun!" he cried.

The man's revolver spat fire and Ralph felt the breeze of a bullet as it passed over his head.

As the man dashed forward again, Ralph dropped to his knees and seized the man around the legs. They rolled on the floor together.

In falling the man dropped his revolver. He grappled with Ralph.

Now, strong though he was for his years, Ralph was no match for his antagonist. The later threw him aside with ease, and before Dick could arrive to lend his friend a helping hand, got to his feet and dashed through the store.

But as he was about to dart to the street, he encountered another obstacle. Tom, just back from having delivered his prisoner, confronted him.

The fugitive hesitated at sight of Tom's uniform, while from behind, Dick, catching sight of Tom, cried:

"Grab him, Tom!"

Instead, Tom whipped out a revolver and placed it up against the man's stomach.

"Hands up, quick!" he said quietly.

The man's hands went into the air.

While Ralph turned to lend a hand to Sergeant Jewett, who was now battling the second plotter hand-to-hand, Dick rushed forward to Tom.

"Quick!" the lad shouted. "Sergeant Jewett needs you. Give me the gun. I'll take care of this fellow."

Tom passed the gun to Dick and dashed through the store.

He reached the back room just in time to see the plotter, ignoring a hard blow from Ralph's right fist, level his revolver squarely at Sergeant Jewett.

Tom uttered a loud cry. It did not prevent the man from pulling the trigger, but it served to spoil his aim.

The bullet went wild.

Before the man could fire again, Tom's strong arms were around him from behind, holding him helpless.

"Bracelets, sergeant," said Tom.

Sergeant Jewett produced a pair of handcuffs, snapped them on the prisoner and then stepped back.

Tom, also producing a pair of handcuffs, hurried back to where Dick was still holding the other man safe, and snapped them on the latter's wrists. Then he marched the man back to his fellow conspirator in the rear of the drug store.

There he found Ralph, armed with Sergeant Jewett's revolver, standing guard over the other prisoner, while the sergeant, on the floor, had raised Phillips' head to his knee.

"Is he badly hurt, sergeant?" asked Tom.

"Can't say, Hazelton. Bullet plowed pretty close to the temple. He's breathing, but I can't say how dangerous the wound is. Go outside and call an ambulance."

Tom hurried to obey these instructions.

Sergeant Jewett continued to bathe Phillips' wound until the ambulance arrived fifteen minutes later.

Phillips was carried tenderly to the ambulance, which then dashed for the hospital at full speed.

"Now," said Sergeant Jewett, "we'll take these fellows along to the barracks."

"Say," said one of the men as the sergeant motioned them to precede him toward the door, "what are you arresting us for? We haven't done anything."

"Oh, you haven't," said Sergeant Jewett. "Don't suppose either of you know anything about the shooting of a guard in the steel plant last night."

The faces of both men turned the color of chalk.

"I—I don't know what you mean," sputtered one.

"You've got me wrong, officer," said the other.

"Oh, I guess not," said Sergeant Jewett. Turning to Ralph he added: "Is either of these the man who shot the guard."

"Keep them walking, sergeant, and I may be able to tell you," said Dick.

He dropped behind. But just before they reached the street door, he said:

"I've spotted him, sergeant."

"Which one?" demanded Sergeant Jewett, motioning a halt.

Dick approached the man who had shot Phillips and had been caught by Tom.

"This is he," he said quietly.

"Sure, son?"

"Absolutely," declared Dick.

"Good!" said the sergeant. "What's your name, my man?"

"Golden," was the reply. "Bill Golden, but I didn't do it, I swear I didn't."

"I heard him called 'Bill' in here last night, too," declared Dick.

"Ha!" said Sergeant Jewett. "Just another link in the chain." He turned to Golden's companion. "Your name?" he asked sharply.

"Shepley—Fred Shepley, but—"

"That'll do, Shepley. Now, I'll give you a

chance. If you're ready to turn state's evidence, I'll try and make it easy for you. What do you say?"

"I—I—" began Shepley.

"Shut up!" cried Golden. "Keep your mouth shut, man. They can't prove anything."

"I—I don't know, Bill," said Shepley. "I—I'm afraid."

Sergeant Jewett, seeing that the man was weakening, pressed his advantage.

"Remember what I said, Shepley," he said. "I'll do my best for you."

"Then I'll talk," declared Shepley suddenly, keeping his eyes off Golden.

"Good!" said Sergeant Jewett, "but not here, Shepley. Your story can wait. Let's get these men to barracks, Hazelton."

The four marched their captives outside. There, chancing to look across the street, Ralph espied Mabel and Ethel looking at the strange procession in wide-eyed surprise.

Ralph lifted his cap, and was awarded by a smile and a nod from both.

The march to the barracks continued.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOYS PAY A CALL.

"WHAT! Going out again tonight, boys?"

The speaker was Ralph's Aunt Mary.

"Why, we thought we'd go down the street for a little while, aunt," was Ralph's reply.

"Then see that you're home early," Aunt Mary enjoined them. "Remember what time it was when you got home this morning."

"We'll try and do better, Mrs. Whitcomb," said Dick with a laugh. "I'm sure things are quiet now."

"Well, I should hope so. It's about time the soldiers took a hand and stopped all this trouble."

"They may have to before it's over," said Ralph.

"Oh, I guess not, Ralph. But come on, if we're going, let's start. It's almost half past seven now."

The lads left the house and walked down the street. When they reached Fifth street, Ralph turned to the left.

Dick looked at him in surprise.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "There is nothing up this way."

"Oh, yes there is," replied Ralph with a smile.

"I'm going to take you with me to pay a little call."

"Call?"

"Yes."

"On whom, pray?"

For Dick had not noticed Ralph when the lad lifted his hat to Ethel and Mabel after the fight in the drug store.

"Well, a couple of young ladies, if you must know."

"Young ladies, eh? Say, you work fast, don't you. I thought you didn't know anyone here?"

"I didn't this morning."

"How'd you get acquainted?"

"I got acquainted while I was tending that soda fountain this morning."

"Explain," said Dick briefly.

Ralph did so.

"Well, said Dick, "you got yourself into this, I don't know why I should go along and help you out."

He stopped, and made as though to turn back.

"Hold on!" cried Ralph in alarm. "I don't want to go by myself."

"You should have thought of that when you made the engagement."

"Maybe I should; but I didn't figure you'd back out on me."

"What are these girls' names, anyhow?" Dick demanded.

"One's Mabel Lovitt and the other's Ethel Bancroft."

"Hm-m. Not bad, though I'm partial to Mabel myself."

"Maybe you won't be when you see 'em. I like Ethel myself."

"We won't fight about it," said Dick with a grin, "and still, I'm not sure that I'll go along."

"Come on now, Dick. Don't leave me to face this thing alone."

"Well, all right. Guess I'd better see you through."

They continued along the street.

It was still light and they found Mabel's home without difficulty. Ethel was already there and the two were seated in a double swing alongside the house.

The girls came forward as the boys entered the little wooden gate.

Ralph introduced Dick, and they all sat down in the swing.

"I was afraid you wouldn't come, Mr. Harkness," said Ethel. "Mabel and I have been terribly excited since all that trouble in the store this morning. Haven't we Mabel?"

"Indeed we have," replied the other girl. "Can you tell us now what it was all about?"

Dick became a listener while Ralph explained.

"Goodness gracious!" Mabel exclaimed when the

lad had finished his story. "And to think you boys were in there while all that fighting was going on. And didn't they shoot at you."

"Well, I felt a bullet whizz over my head," said Ralph modestly, "but there really wasn't any danger."

"No danger!" exclaimed Mabel. "Why, it's a miracle you weren't both killed. Some of these strikers are bad men. Father says the government should send troops to all the steel towns."

"Is your father a steel man, Miss Lovitt?" asked Dick.

"Yes. He's vice-president of the Steel Tube Company."

"Then that explains why you are so well acquainted with Harry," said Ralph with a smile.

"Yes; but Harry is a snob. He thinks he's the biggest boy in town just because his father is president of the company."

"Oh, he may be all right," said Ralph, not wishing to speak ill of his morning's antagonist behind his back.

"Well, he's not," said Ethel with some spirit. "But tell me, are you going to be in Wilmercairn long?"

"Well," said Dick, "we had not figured on staying more than a week. But then we didn't know we should have the pleasure of meeting two such charming girls."

Mabel and Ethel both flushed, but they appeared pleased nevertheless.

"Then we may hope to see you again before you leave," said Ethel.

"You certainly will," declared Ralph recklessly.

So the evening passed pleasantly, and it was after nine o'clock before the lads realized it. They rose to go, but before she would permit this, Mabel insisted on setting out ice cream and cake, which was disposed of with relish.

Then Dick and Ralph accompanied Ethel to her home.

"Well, we're a little late again," said Ralph as they turned their footsteps homeward.

"Not much, though," replied Dick. "Surely your aunt won't give us another wigging."

"Can't tell about Aunt Mary," said Ralph. "She does take a fellow to task right along, but she doesn't mean anything by it."

"Well, they're a couple of pretty nice girls, if you ask me," Dick declared, "but, as I told you before I met them, I'm partial to Mabel."

"Everything is all right then," said Ralph. "I still insist that Ethel is my favorite. But say! you're quite a gallant when you set out to be."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean."

"I don't.

"Well, how about that pretty little speech you made back there?"

Dick reddened, and was thankful that it was so dark that Ralph could not see his face.

"You're the fellow who didn't want to go," Ralph taunted.

"That's all right. You wanted to back out yourself."

"I'm glad we went, anyhow," Ralph declared?

"So'm I."

And there the conversation rested.

As Ralph had predicted, Aunt Mary was waiting for them when they reached home.

"Why didn't you go to bed, aunt?" asked Ralph.

"I was worried about you boys. After what happened last night I'll never rest easy at night when you're not in the house."

Ralph laughed.

"We can take care of ourselves, aunt," he said. "We're getting to be pretty big boys, you know."

"Nevertheless," said Aunt Mary, "I felt called upon to write to your mother, Ralph, and outline the situation here. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if she wrote for you to come home."

"Oh, Aunt Mary! Why did you do that?"

"I felt it was my duty."

Ralph made a grimace.

"Well, let's hope she doesn't," he replied. "We've

just made a couple of very nice friends, and we'd like to stay awhile."

"You'd better be careful what boys you pick up with here," said Aunt Mary. "Some of them are a bad lot."

Dick laughed out loud.

"These aren't boys, though, Mrs. Whitcomb."

Aunt Mary threw up her hands.

"You don't mean girls, Ralph?" she exclaimed.

Ralph glared at Dick wrathfully before he replied.

"Well, I guess I do, aunt."

"Who are they?" Aunt Mary demanded severely.

Ralph mentioned their names, and Aunt Mary's look of disapproval faded.

"That's different," she said. "Why, their families are among the best in Wilmercairn.

"We're not worrying about their families."

"Nevertheless, a good family is something," Aunt Mary maintained. "Do you boys want a bite to eat before you go to bed?"

"We had some ice cream before we came home," said Ralph, "but I believe I feel a little gnawing under my belt."

Aunt Mary smiled happily. She was never so pleased as when she was doing something for somebody, particularly Ralph, who, in earlier years, she had helped bring up.

"I'll have some cake and milk in a jiffy," she

said; "and how about some nice strawberry preserves?"

"Bring them along, auntie," said Ralph. "We'll promise to do them justice."

"We certainly will," Dick agreed.

"I never saw a growing boy when he wasn't hungry," Aunt Mary mumbled as she left the room.

She was back directly with bread, milk, cake and preserves, and the boys fell to with a will.

"Well," said Dick, rising at last, "they say it's bad to go to bed on a full stomach; but I'm like a snake. As soon as I'm full I want to sleep."

"Same here," declared Ralph.

"Let's hit the hay, then," said Ralph.

Fifteen minutes later they were fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

HARRY LANG.

It was the next day that the lads met with a peculiar adventure.

Walking down Main street in the afternoon, Dick and Ralph passed half a dozen boys about their own age standing in the door of a confectionery store.

"There's Harry," said Ralph, recognizing his would-be customer of the day before.

"Who?" asked Dick.

"Harry! Harry Lang, son of the president of the steel company, the fellow I threatened to throw out of the drug store yesterday."

"Oh, so that's Harry, eh? Can't say I think much of his looks."

"Nor I."

"Well, he doesn't seem to think much of us either. Of you, anyhow, from the way he's looking in this direction."

The lads were about to pass by, when young Lang left his companions and stepped forward. He addressed Ralph.

"Aren't you the fellow who was playing soda clerk yesterday?" he asked.

Ralph grinned.

"I'm the fellow," he asked. "Why."

"I thought so. I—"

Ralph thought it best to pass the matter off as a joke if posible.

"Sorry you didn't like me as a soda clerk," he laughed, interrupting the other. "I don't know much about it, and that's the truth. Hope there are no hard feelings, but you rather stirred me up."

"I'll stir you up a little more before I'm through with you," snarled Harry. "Trying to show off before the girls, were you?"

"I guess it was you who was trying to show off," said Ralph, beginning to lose his temper.

"Is that so? I heard you and this other fellow were out to see them last night."

Dick, at first, was tempted to interfere, but at this remark he decided he might as well let Ralph do the talking.

"What if we were?" asked Ralph shortly.

"Just this. I won't stand for it. Neither will any of the other fellows who live here. I'll have to have your words you won't do it again."

Dick laughed aloud, and young Lang turned on him.

"What are you laughing at?" he demanded.

"Do you ever look in a mirror?" asked Dick.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, if you'll look in one, you'll see what I was laughing at."

Young Lang clenched his fists and seemed about to leap on Dick; but Ralph interfered.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Your quarrel, if quarrel it is, seems to be with me. Now let me tell you something. We go where we please and we ask no one's permission. Do you get that?"

"But I won't have it."

"Don't be a fool," said Ralph.

"What! You dare to call me a fool. Do you know who I am?"

"Oh, yes, I know who you are," replied Ralph

wearily. "Also I know what you are. You'll wear a long pair of ears when you grow up."

Young Lang's companions, who had been gradually drawing in on the others, uttered cries of rage at this remark.

"Hit him, Harry," said one.

"Roll him into the street," cried another.

"Chase 'em both out of town," shouted a third.

It looked like trouble.

Dick looked around. They were outnumbered more than three to one. Dick had not the slighest doubt that he and Ralph could take care of themselves, but odds such as these were not to be treated lightly.

He shifted his position, then cried suddenly:

"Back to the wall, Ralph."

Ralph moved as promptly as his chum, and before any of the others could interfere, they had backed up against the building.

"Shall we rush 'em, Dick?" asked Ralph in a low voice.

Dick shook his head.

"We don't want to start anything," he said. "Let them make the first move."

Young Lang, egged on by his companions, advanced until he stood close to Ralph.

"Will you make the promise I asked?" he inquired.

"Not by a long shot," was Ralph's reply.

"Then you're going to get licked."

"I guess you won't be the one to do it," taunted Ralph.

"Hit him, Harry," cried one of his companions again.

Without further warning, Harry stepped forward and struck out. But his blow found no mark, and to his surprise he went spinning backwards into the arms of his companions, a painful ache in his jaw where Ralph's fist had found it's objective.

With a shout Harry sprang forward again.

"At 'em fellows!" he cried.

The others needed no further urging. They sprang forward.

In spite of the odds against them, Dick and Ralph fought cooly. In vain their foes tried to lure them into the open. They stuck close together and kept their backs to the wall.

Both Dick and Ralph were hit time after time, but none of the enemy seemed anxious to get close to mix things, so the blows did no great damage.

Young Lang had signalled Ralph out for his particular victim, and tried in every way he knew to land a telling blow. Ralph, realizing this, determined to bring matters to an issue.

As Harry rushed again, Ralph, instead of remaining on the defensive as before, stepped forward to meet him. He feinted with his left and struck hard with his right.

For a moment the others drew off as Harry fell to the pavement.

He was up in a moment, however and sprang forward again.

Once more Ralph stepped forward to meet him, and again Harry rolled in the dirt.

Ralph, in stepping back toward the wall, slipped. Before he could recover his balance, the others were upon him. Ralph went to the sidewalk beneath them.

Seeing his chum's perilous situation, Dick sprang forward with a shout.

Three of the enemy, leaving Ralph to their friends, closed in on Dick. The lad had exposed his back at last, and the enemies were not slow to take advantage of this fact.

Ralph was endeavoring to shake off his foes and scramble to his feet, but was not having much luck. Dick was striking out fast and furiously.

For the moment the tide of battle turned in favor of the enemy.

But it was for a moment only.

The struggle, which had lasted for some minutes now, had drawn a crowd of spectators, who danced excitedly about shouting advice to the combatants.

Among these was a figure whom the reader has met before.

For a moment he watched the struggle only half

interested, then, catching sight of Dick's face, he sprang forward with a shout.

Under this unexpected attack, two of the lads' foes were hurled aside, and Dick gained a breathing space.

The newcomer seized one of the lads who was sprawled over Ralph by the collar and jerked him to his feet. Dick did the same with another. Then, as Dick looked at his rescuer for the first time, a cry went up from the boy nearest him.

"Jerry Eagan, fellows! Look out! It's Jerry Eagan!"

Those of the enemy who were on their feet turned and took to their heels. Others, on the ground, got up quickly and followed them.

Only Young Lang faced Dick, Jerry and Ralph, who had also risen to his feet. Lang was about to make a remark when Jerry stopped him.

"Don't be a fool, Lang," he said. "Either one of these boys could lick three like you. You've tried to lick me two and three at a time and couldn't do it. Well, this fellow," pointing to Dick, "did it single handed. What chance do you figure you have with him?"

Young Lang made no reply. He turned and walked away; but after taking half a dozen steps he turned and shook his fist at Dick and Ralph.

"I'll get even with you yet," he cried. "I'm going to run you both out of town."

Ralph and Dick grinned disdainfully, and after some other threats, Harry followed his vanquished companions down the street.

Jerry shook hands with Ralph and Dick.

"Glad I came up in time to lend a hand," he said.

"Good job for us you did," said Dick.

"Oh, I don't know. From what Uncle Jim says I guess you'd have managed to wiggle out some way."

"I'm not so sure of that," declared Ralph. "I wasn't much use where they had me."

"That's a fact, Ralph," said Dick with a grin. "But you don't look so bad at that."

Ralph passed a hand over his face, which was bleeding slightly from cuts on either cheek.

"It'll come away with a little soap and water, I guess," he said. "I don't think I'll even need to put plaster over the cuts. But you don't show a mark, Dick."

"I've a couple of knots on my head nevertheless. If those fellows had just taken their time, its hard to say what we would look like now. But they seem to hold you in no little respect, Jerry."

"Yes. We've had a little trouble before," Jerry replied grimly.

"Well," said Ralph, "we'd better go home and wash up."

"I can tell you a better one than that," said Jerry.

"Just come home with me. It's closer, and besides, Uncle Jim wants to see you?"

"Glad to," said Ralph. "But what does Big Jim want to see us about? Nothing important, is it"?

"He said it was. In fact, he sent me after you. I was headed for your aunt's house when I saw this mix-up."

"Lead the way, Jerry. We're right with you," said Dick.

Jerry turned and headed toward home with Dick and Ralph at his side.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT BIG JIM WANTED.

THE boys found Big Jim sitting on the front porch of his little frame home which was one of a row of a dozen similar buildings situated about three blocks from the steel plant. A woman sat beside him.

Big Jim shook hands with the boys and turned to the woman.

"These are the boys I was telling you about, Margaret," he said. "Boys, this is my sister, Mrs. Eagan. She's Jerry's mother."

She shook hands with the boys, and then entered

the house. Big Jim motioned Dick, Ralph and Jerry to seats beside him.

"Make yourselves comfortable," he said. "It's a hot day, and this is about the coolest place I can find. But what's the matter with your face, Ralph?"

"Nothing much," replied Ralph somewhat sheepishly. "I had an argument with a fellow up the street. That's all."

"Oh, you did, eh?" said Big Jim. "I should have known without asking. You look a little dishevelled, too, Dick. Jerry, take them in the house and let them wash up a bit."

The lads followed Jerry inside, where they doctored themselves up. Then they returned to their seats on the porch.

"Now we can have a good talk," said Big Jim.

"Jerry said you wanted to see us about something important, Big Jim," said Ralph.

"That's right, but I don't want you to tell a soul where you got the information I'm about to impart to you."

"Of course not, if you don't wish us to," said Dick.

"I knew I could rely on your discretion. You see, if some of the others knew I was talking, they'd accuse me of being disloyal. But the fact is that the strike is not being carried on to suit the more conservative element. For instance, the cooler heads deplore the trouble of night before last, while

some of the firebrands,—composed entirely of Hungarians, Slovaks, and other foreigners,—are for taking still more drastic steps. As a matter of fact, what they want to do is seize the mill."

The lads eyed Big Jim in amazement.

"You don't mean it," said Ralph.

"But I do."

"It's impossible," Dick declared. "The plant is well guarded; and besides the guards they'd have to dispose of the state police and local authorities."

Big Jim nodded.

"I know all that," he said. "With some of the others I've tried to argue them out of the idea, but I'm afraid we haven't been successful. Besides, word has been received that hundreds of strikebreakers are on their way here, and the officials intend to resume operations in a few days."

"I hadn't heard of that," said Ralph.

"Nor I," added Dick.

"Well, I don't know whether it's so or not," said Big Jim; but if an attempt is made to reopen the mill with strikebreakers, it will mean trouble of course. That's why I wanted to see you."

"But what can we do about it, Big Jim?" asked Dick.

"Well, young feller," said Big Jim, "I remember the other day that you made quite a hit with the general manager of the mills, Mr. Zachary. I

thought maybe if you put the proposition up to him it might help."

"I see," said Dick. "Well, I'm willing to do it, Big Jim, but I don't believe my words would have any weight. I'm only a boy, you know."

"Oh, I don't expect you to advise him; but if you tell Zachary what I've told you, he'll know it's true."

"But what makes you so sure the strikers—the foreigners, I mean—will molest the mill if strike-breakers arrive?"

Big Jim hesitated a moment, then said:

"Seeing that I've told you this much, I guess I might as well go ahead, young feller. There was a meeting last night at labor hall. Half a dozen professional agitators were there and they stirred things up, I can tell you. They sprung this story about the strikebreakers,—and, as I said, whether it's true or not I don't know,—but they convinced the foreigners, all right; and those are the fellows who are just running this strike. All we can do is sit back and listen.

"Well, they've sent out telegrams to see whether the strikebreakers are on the road. I know, and so do you, that the answer is going to say they are, whether it's true or not. What these agitators are looking for is trouble, and the foreigners are right with them. If this answer,—which will be read at the meeting at labor hall tonight,—says strikebreak-

ers are on the way, the agitators are going ahead with plans to seize the plant."

"I see," said Dick; "and what would you suggest that the steel officials do?"

"Why, I'd have them issue an official bulletin to the effect that the mill would not resume until the strike has been settled one way or the other,—that under no circumstances will they import strikebreakers. Then, if such steps are being considered, I would advise that they be dropped at once."

"But would such a statement convince the men?" asked Ralph. "Wouldn't the agitators concoct some other story?"

"We American strikers will lend a hand in convincing the men," said Big Jim grimly. "As for what the agitators may do then, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

"Big Jim," said Dick, "why is it that you Americans don't get together and throw these foreigners out?"

"Throw 'em out?" Big Jim exploded. "Say, what chance would we have. Why, there are a hundred 'Hunkies' in the mills to every American. No, it can't be done. Besides, we've lost whatever influence we may have had over them because we haven't joined in their plans."

"Well," said Dick, "as I said before, I'm perfectly willing to go to the general manager and re-

peat what you've told me. Just what good it will do I can't say."

"It may help," declared Ralph. "At least it can't make the situation any worse."

Dick turned to Jerry.

"Where do you stand in this thing?" he asked.

"Why, I'm with Uncle Jim of course," replied Jerry. "I'll admit I was a bit hot-headed the other day, but I can see now that if American workmen in the mills want to be respected and hold their jobs they've got to behave themselves."

Ralph smiled.

"Too bad the 'Hunkies,' as Big Jim calls them, can't be convinced of that, too," he said.

"By the way, Big Jim," said Dick, "what are the chances of getting into that meeting tonight?"

Big Jim hesitated. Then he said:

"Well, I guess no harm can come to you there. All you have to do is to whisper the word 'victory' to the man at the door. That's the password. I wouldn't tell you only I know the other side will have those there who have no more right to be there than you have."

Dick got to his feet. Ralph followed his example.

"We'll be going, then, Big Jim," said the former. "We'll try and get back here before going home, but if we don't we may see you at the meeting tonight. By the way, what time does it start?"

"Seven thirty."

"All right. Well, so long."

"So long," repeated Big Jim. "Good luck."

The lads left the house and walked toward the mill entrance.

"Hold on!" said Ralph suddenly. "How do you figure we're going to get inside the gates?"

"Tell the guards we want to see Mr. Zachary."

"That's not going to get us in. The guards won't know us from Adam. We might be a couple of assassins so far as he could tell."

"That's so, too," said Dick reflectively. "Well, then, we'll hunt up Sergeant Jewett. He'll give us a pass through the gate, I'm sure."

"No harm in asking, anyhow," Ralph agreed.

They swung off to the left at the first street and presently arrived at the emergency barracks occupied by the State Police.

"Where's Sergeant Jewett?" asked Ralph of a trooper.

"Inside. Walk in," was the reply, for the man knew them.

They found Sergeant Jewett pacing up and down in his quarters.

"Hello, boys," he said as they drew near. "Thought you'd gone back to Harrisburg by this time. What can I do for you?"

"We want a pass into the mill, sir," said Dick.

"A pass? What for?"

"Well, I'd rather not tell you right now, sir," replied Dick. "But it's important."

For a moment it seemed that Sergeant Jewett was about to refuse, but at length he drew paper and pencil from his pocket and scribbled briefly.

"There," he said passing the paper to Dick. "Show that to a guard at any of the gates. He'll let you through."

"Thank you, sir," said Dick. "By the way, how's Phillips?"

Sergeant Jewett shook his head.

"In pretty bad shape," he said. "Hospital authorities say he'll recover, but I'm not so sure. However, he seems to be improving. I went up to see him this morning. He's conscious."

"I certainly hope he pulls through, sir," Ralph declared. "He's a good policeman."

"So are the rest of my men," said Sergeant Jewett grimly. "For that matter, you boys are becoming pretty good state troopers yourselves. I understand the fellows back in Harrisburg call you the 'Boy Troopers.'"

"I believe they do, sir," Dick admitted, "though I can't see why."

"You can't, eh? Well, from what I've heard about you it's plain enough to me."

"Well, we have managed to help out a little," said Ralph.

"And then some," declared Sergeant Jewett.

"Now I don't want to hurry you off, but if you have any business in the mill you'd better be on your way. It's almost five o'clock, and most of the officials will be leaving."

The boys thanked the sergeant once more, and leaving the barracks, headed for the main entrance to the mill.

CHAPTER XVII.

INSIDE THE MILL.

INSIDE the main mill gate a guard held his rifle ready for action as the lads approached outside.

"Halt!" he cried.

Dick and Ralph stopped in their tracks.

"What do you want here?" demanded the guard.

"We want to come in," replied Dick.

"Against orders," replied the guard. "Get away from here."

"Wait a minute now," said Dick. "We've a pass."

"A pass? Where'd you get it?"

"From Sergeant Jewett of the State police."

Dick displayed the pass in his hand.

The guard lowered his rifle, and came closer to the gate.

"Let's see it," he demanded.

Dick passed him the slip of paper.

A moment later the guard swung back the gate.

"Come in," he said briefly.

The lads passed through and the heavy gate swung to behind them.

The guard locked it again.

"Where can we find the general manager?" asked Dick.

The guard pointed to the offices adjoining the mill proper.

"He's in there some place," he replied. "Inquire at the door."

The boys hurried toward the offices.

Just inside they were stopped again, this time by a clerk.

"What's your business?" the clerk inquired.

"We want to see Mr. Zachary," said Ralph.

"Mr. Zachary is busy right now," was the reply. "Can't you come tomorrow?"

Ralph shook his head.

"Our business is important, and will permit of no delay," he said.

"What's the nature of it? Maybe I will do as well."

"You won't in this case," said Dick. "We'll wait."

He sat down on a bench just inside the door. So did Ralph.

"Mr. Zachary is likely to be busy for an hour or more," said the clerk.

"We'll wait that long," said Dick.

"But he may be busy even longer."

"We'll wait anyhow," said Dick briefly.

The clerk scowled, but walked away.

Dick looked around the room, clustered with desks, few of which were occupied now, however. At the far end of the room he saw several private offices. One read, "Mr. Lang, president." Next to it was the office of the vice-president, the lad could see, for the door bore the legend, "Mr. Lovitt, vice-president," while on a third door the lad read the words, "Mr. Zachary, General Manager."

"That's the man we want to see," Dick told himself.

Voices came from the president's room.

"Must be a consultation," Dick told himself.

The lads had been waiting possibly half an hour when the door through which they had entered was opened and a youthful figure stepped through. The newcomer's eyes rested on Ralph and Dick and he scowled.

It was Harry Lang, the president's son.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"We didn't come to see you," said Ralph.

"I guess not. Well, you won't see anyone else in here if I can help it. I'll have you thrown out."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," said Dick with a grin.

Harry made no reply. Instead he walked across the room to the door marked "private" and flung it open.

The voices inside became silent, but finally some one demanded sternly:

"Harry, how often have I told you not to break in here like that? I'm busy. Get out."

"But there are a couple of fellows here who should be kicked out, father," came Harry's voice.

"Who are they?"

"I don't know their names."

"I'll see about that," said the other voice. "Excuse me a moment, gentlemen."

Harry reappeared in the door followed by a grey-headed, grey-bearded man of medium stature. With Harry he walked up to Dick and Ralph.

"What do you boys want in here?" he asked.

"We're here to see Mr. Zachary, sir," replied Ralph respectfully. "We've important business with him."

"Don't you believe it, father," cried Harry. "Why, they assaulted me in the street a little while ago."

Mr. Lang looked at the boys sternly.

"Is that true?" he asked.

"No, sir, it is not," replied Dick, rising. "It is true that we had some trouble with your son, but we were not the aggressors."

"Explain this, my son," said Mr. Lang, turning to Harry.

On the spur of the moment Harry concocted a story that put Dick and Ralph in a very unfavorable light. When he had concluded, Mr. Lang turned to the lads.

"You've heard what my son says," he said. "I must believe him. Now will you kindly leave this office?"

"I assure you, Mr. Lang," said Dick, "that we must see Mr. Zachary. I don't wish to enter into a controversy with your son, so I will not take the trouble to deny his fanciful tale. But if you will just call Mr. Zachary, I'm sure he will vouch for me, sir."

Mr. Lang looked around the room. He hesitated, and seemed on the point of calling several of the clerks to eject the two lads. But apparently he thought better of this, for he exclaimed:

"I'll do it."

He crossed the room to his own private sanctum, and sticking in his head called out:

"Zachary, come here, will you. Couple of boys want to see you."

A moment later the general manager appeared. He recognized Dick at first, and stepped forward with outstretched hand.

"Hello!" he said. "It's my young friend of the street car."

"You know him, then?" asked Mr. Lang.

"Know him? I certainly do. He's the boy I was telling you about who helped check the mob when it attacked the street car."

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Lang.

Harry Lang's face fell, and he slunk toward the door; but just as he was about to pass out, his father halted him with a word.

"You go straight home, Harry," he said, and added grimly: "I'll have a few words with you after dinner."

Harry made no reply, but stepped out of the office. His father turned to Zachary.

"Introduce me to this young man, will you Zachary?" he said.

The general manager performed the introduction, and Dick in turn introduced Ralph.

There was a great handshaking all around.

At this juncture a third figure came out of the president's office.

"Come here, Lovitt, and meet my young friends," said the general manager. "One of them is the boy I was telling you about who acted so nobly on the street car the other day.

Dick and Ralph shook hands with the vice-president. He eyed them keenly.

"Weren't you young fellows out to my house last night?" he asked.

In spite of themselves, Dick and Ralph blushed.

"Yes, sir, we were," replied Dick.

"I thought so. I caught sight of you as you came in the gate, and this morning at the breakfast table my daughter spent half an hour telling me about you. I'm glad to meet you both personally."

The general manager turned to Dick.

"I understand you came to see me about something," he said.

"Yes, sir. It has to do with the mill," was the lad's reply.

"Oh," said Zachary, "I thought you had come after that job I promised you several days ago."

"Not yet, sir," said Dick with a grin. "I may come some time, though, if I ever get through school."

"Well, don't forget the offer stands as long as I'm here. But if you have business with me now, and it has to do with the mill, I suggest that we all adjourn to President Lang's office. There will be no objection to the others listening to what you have to say, I take it?"

"None at all, sir."

"Come then."

The general manager led the way to President Lang's office, where all took seats.

"Now tell me what it's all about," said the general manager.

"First, sir," Dick replied, "I want to tell you why

I happen to come to you instead of going to one of the other officials of the plant."

"I suppose that is because you thought we got pretty well acquainted the other day," grinned the general manager.

Dick returned the other's smile?

"I guess that is right, sir. But even then I doubt if I'd have come direct to you if it hadn't been for Big Jim."

"Big Jim?"

"Yes, sir. The man who came to our rescue the other day.

"Oh, you mean Henderson."

"Yes, sir."

"But I didn't know any of the strikers thought enough of me to send me a message," said Zachary.

"That's where you wrong them, sir," declared Dick with spirit. "The Americans are true blue at heart, with few exceptions, and have refused to countenance the actions of the foreign element, led by a few American agitators."

"I'm surely glad to hear it," declared the general manager grimly, "but that is not what you came here to tell me."

"No, sir, it isn't."

"Then come to the point," said the general manager. "I'm a busy man, and my time is not my own. You say your visit has something to do with the strike. Proceed, if you please."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FAILURE.

"May I ask you one question before I proceed, sir?" asked Dick.

"Go ahead," replied the general manager.

"Is it true that strikebreakers are on the way here in force?"

Zachary looked at the president and the vice-president before he replied, and gave expression to a long "Phew."

Then he nodded.

"It is," he said, "though I was not aware anyone knew it outside of officials of the company."

"And you are planning to resume operations as soon as they arrive?" asked Dick.

"That's two questions," replied the general manager, "but I'll answer that, also. Yes it is true, though I don't know how you learned of it."

"There must be an informer in the office," declared President Lang. "These matters have been discussed by no one save us three, Zachary, and I'm sure I have not mentioned the matter outside of this office."

"Nor have I, Lang," said the general manager.

"I haven't opened my head on the subject," declared the vice-president. "However, if our plans are known, there is no use trying to make secret of them any longer."

"Now that I've answered your questions," said the general manager to Dick, "perhaps you will proceed."

"All right, sir. Now I don't know how these plans have come to the ears of the strikers, but they apparently know all about them. They were discussed at a mass meeting in labor hall last night, and a committee, composed of agitators, I take it, appointed to inquire further and report back tonight. Now, if the committee reports that they have verified the report, the foreign strikers, headed by the agitators, plan to seize the mill before the strikebreakers arrive."

The three steel officials were on their feet almost as one man.

"Seize the mill!" cried President Lang.

"They must be mad," declared vice-president Lovitt.

"This means trouble, gentlemen," said the general manager quietly.

"Where did you get this information, young man?" demanded President Lang.

"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you that, sir," replied

Dick, "but I can assure you that my information is authentic."

"I've no doubt of it," said Manager Zachary, "and I can tell you where you got your information."

"You can?" Ralph exclaimed in surprise.

"Of course. Didn't young Hazelton just say that Henderson advised him to come to me?"

"But that doesn't mean the he gave the information. Good advice and information are two different things."

"And we do not admit that you're right," said Ralph.

"But you can't deny it, either. Can you?"

Neither lad replied, and the general manager went on:

"Never mind. If you do not wish to divulge the source of your information, we won't inquire further, but I am sorry matters have reached such a pass. I'm afraid we'll have to appeal to the governor for the soldiers, Lang."

Lang nodded affirmatively.

"I fear so," he replied. "There seems nothing else we can do."

"One moment, sir," said Dick. "It strikes me there is something else you can do, and the man who furnished me with the information I have just imparted to you is of the same opinion."

"You mean Henderson?" interrupted the general manager.

"I didn't mention any names, sir," replied Dick.

"Never mind. What is this idea?"

"Why, sir, head off the strikebreakers, and issue a circular announcing that the mill will not resume operations until the strike has been settled by arbitration."

General Manager Zachary shook his head.

"Can't be done, young man," he said quietly.

Dick's heart sank.

"I was afraid you'd say that, sir," he replied, "but at the same time it seems the only solution of the problem."

"Not at all," declared President Lang. "We've been lenient with the strikers long enough. Now it is time to meet fire with fire. With this plant idle we are losing thousands of dollars daily."

"So are the men, if I may say so, sir," Ralph put in.

"That's their own fault," shouted President Lang, banging his fist on the table. "No, we'll either have to resume operations within the week or go out of business permanently. I don't suppose the men have thought of that."

"Probably not," Ralph admitted.

"It seems to me," the vice-president put it, "that what the men want is for us to make them a present of the plant."

"It certainly looks that way," agreed President Lang.

The General manager addressed Dick again.

"We're under great obligations to you boys for putting us in possession of this information," he said, "and equally sorry we cannot act upon your advice. But you see, boys, your ideas are not mature. We've been in this business for a great many years an this is not the first strike we have been through. But now that we know the plans of the strikers we will be better able to protect ourselves."

He got to his feet and the lads knew that the interview was over.

They rose to go.

As they did so, Ralph, looking toward the closed door, suddenly laid a finger to his lips. The others stood stock still.

Quietly Ralph tip-toed across the floor, laid his hand on the knob and flung the door open.

The clerk who had admitted the two boys a short time before fell sprawling into the room.

He picked himself up at once, and gazed in alarm at the stern faces of the steel officials.

"I was just picking up a piece of paper that blew off my desk," he explained.

But the expression on his face belied his words.

General Manager Zachary stepped close to the clerk, and shook a finger in the man's face.

"So you're the spy, Hinton!" he exclaimed.

"Spy, sir? I don't understand," the clerk replied.

"Oh, yes you do, Hinton. No wonder the strikers are informed of our plans."

"But, I assure you—" the man began.

"Silence!" thundered President Lang. "Hinton, how much are we paying you?"

"Hundred and fifty a month, sir."

"Got that much in your pocket, Zachary?" asked the president.

The general manager produced a roll of bills.

"Here you are," he said, peeling off a few.

President Lang passed the bills along to Hinton.

"Take this money and get out," he said. "Don't let me catch you inside the gates again."

"But—" Hinton started to protest.

Before he could say more, the general manager stepped forward, seized him by the back of the coat and the seat of the trousers, and propelled him toward the door.

"Open the door, will you Hazelton?" he called.

Dick hastened to obey.

The general manager hastened his prisoner to the door, and with a final push sent him sprawling down the short pair of stairs.

There Hinton picked himself up, turned and shook a fist at the figures above him.

"I'll get even with you, Zachary!" he cried. "I'll burn the plant down myself!"

"You'll keep out of my way if you're wise," the

general manager called back. "Next time you cross my path I'll give you the thrashing you deserve."

As the boys were paying their adieus to the officials, Vice-President Lovitt said:

"I'm just going home to dinner. Won't you go with me?"

Both lads looked pleased, and the vice-president pressed his invitation.

"We'll have to call up my aunt first, so she won't worry," said Ralph.

President Lang motioned to the phone on his desk.

"Help yourself," he said.

So the boys went home with the vice-president to dinner and there, to Ralph's delight, they found that Ethel had accepted Mabel's invitation to remain to dinner.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MEETING.

"MUST you go so soon?" asked Mabel, as the lads rose to take their leave shortly after seven o'clock.

"It's too bad," declared Ethel. "I thought maybe we would take in a movie tonight."

"We're awfully sorry," said Dick, "but we have a little business to attend to and we can't very well put it off."

"I suppose it has something more to do with this awful strike?" queried Mabel.

"It may have," replied Dick with a smile.

"Well, I don't see why you should worry about the strike," the girl pouted. "That is for the grown-ups to settle, I should say."

"I agree with Mabel," Ethel declared.

Ralph laughed.

"There are some things boys can do better than grown-ups," he declared. "This happens to be one of them. But we'll be glad to take you to the movies some other night if you care to go."

"How about Friday night?" asked Dick. "This is Wednesday."

"Of course, we'll be glad to go," said Mabel.

The boys left the house. Outside they stopped to shake hands with Mabel's father.

"Going early, aren't you boys?" he asked.

"We thought we'd take in that meeting tonight," Dick explained.

"Oh! I see, be careful and don't get into trouble."

"We won't if we can help it," Ralph replied.

It was just half past seven when they reached labor hall. Already the hall was well filled, and other men kept pouring in.

"There's going to be an overflow crowd," said Ralph, as they ascended the stairs.

Dick nodded.

"Pick out the exits," he advised his chum. "That's the first thing I do when I get in a crowded room. You never know when you might need them. A fire or a riot is likely to break out at any time, you know."

Besides the stairs, there appeared to be only two other exits, fire escapes on either side of the hall. These led off from the only two windows in the room.

The front part of the hall was filled, so the boys were forced to take seats pretty well back. They had approached the door with some misgiving fearing they might be denied admittance, but they had murmured the word 'victory' and passed the doorkeeper without question.

"See anything of Big Jim?" asked Ralph, looking around.

"No, nor Jerry either."

"They'll be here, all right."

"Not much doubt about that."

The lads found themselves on the side of the hall where the American strikers had congregated. On the other side of the single aisle were nothing but foreigners.

While the lads were gazing about the room, a

hand tapped Ralph on the shoulder. He turned and looked into the smiling face of Big Jim.

"Hello!" said Ralph. "I didn't see you when you came in, nor Jerry either," for Big Jim's nephew was with him.

The four looked around to make sure they were not overheard, and Jerry inquired:

"What luck at the mill?"

Dick shook his head sadly.

"None," he replied.

"I feared it," said Big Jim. "Well, it's too bad. Now I suppose these 'Hunkies' will go ahead with their plans. Of course they don't know the officials have been tipped off."

"They may though," Ralph declared grimly.

Big Jim stirred uneasily.

"You didn't tell Zachary where you got your information?" he asked. "I particularly asked you not to do that."

"No, we didn't, although the general manager suspects," replied Dick; "but the strikers had a spy outside while we were talking."

"A spy?"

"Exactly. Clerk named Hinton. Ralph caught him listening at the door and Zachary threw him out."

"H-m," said Big Jim. "That means that if the clerk should attend this meeting, he may recognize and denounce you fellers."

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of that," Dick declared.

"Well, he won't hardly pick us out of this crowd," Ralph said hopefully. "If he does, though, we'll go down that fire escape."

"Trouble is," said Big Jim, "any excitement of that sort will only hurry up the trouble.

"Well, it can't be helped now, uncle," said Jerry.

"Jerry's right," Dick declared. "We'll just sit tight and await developments."

"Things are about to get moving," said Big Jim. "There's Blount just going up on the platform."

"Who's Blount?" Dick wanted to know.

"Blount's the ring leader in this business. He used to work alongside me at the furnaces. But he was always hob-nobbing with the foreigners, and they think he's a great man. Hello! There goes O'Rourke, too."

"Who's O'Rourke?"

"O'Rourke is chairman of the committee named to investigate the report that strikebreakers are on their way to Wilmercairn. Chances are he's been in bed all day, but he'll make the kind of a report that Blount wants just the same."

Further conversation was halted by the chairman of the meeting, who pounded on his little desk with a gavel.

"The meeting will come to order," he cried.

It is doubtful whether a tenth of the foreigners in the hall understood the chairman's words, but they became instinctively quiet.

Big Jim leaned over and touched Dick on the arm.

"The chairman is all right," he said. "He's a staunch American, and opposed to radicalism."

"Who is he?" asked Dick.

"Name is Brandon. All our hopes of peace rest with him."

"Let's hope he can hold 'em in check then," said Ralph.

"No chance," muttered Jerry.

"We will now hear the report of the chairman of the committee appointed to investigate the report of the coming of strikebreakers," said Chairman Blandon. "Mr. O'Rourke."

O'Rourke advanced to the front of the platform and bowed.

"The strikebreakers will be here tomorrow afternoon," he informed the strikers. "Upon their arrival, officials of the steel plant will announce that the mills will resume operations Friday. That's all I have to report, Mr. Chairman."

As interpreters explained O'Rourke's words to the foreigners, pandemonium broke loose in the hall. The foreigners became a yelling, struggling mass.

In vain Chairman Brandon tried to bring order out of chaos.

Suddenly a figure dashed toward the rostrum and yelled excitedly in Blount's ear. Then Dick and Ralph saw Blount's eyes turned in their direction. Blount advanced to the edge of the platform, and raised his voice in a shout.

Instantly the foreigners became quiet.

Dick turned to Big Jim.

"We've got to get out of here," he said hurriedly.

"Why, what's the mater?"

"The man who just spoke to Blount is Hinton, the clerk we discovered eavesdropping in the mill this afternoon."

"You think he has recognized you?"

"He pointed right at us," Ralph declared.

"Wait," said Big Jim. "Blount is going to say something."

"Men," said the agitator from the platform, "I want to tell you that we have spies among us tonight."

Instantly the furor broke out again, but once more Blount raised a hand for silence, and got it.

"These spies," he continued. "have told our plans to the company officials. They—"

"Hold on now, Blount!"

The interruption came from Chairman Brandon.

But the foreigners howled him down. Brandon gave a shrug of indifference, and left the platform to Blount. Quietly the chairman made his way to that part of the room occupied by the Americans.

and Dick and Ralph could see that the American strikers kept their eyes on him.

Dick's heart leaped suddenly.

"By Jove!" he muttered under his breath. "The Americans have come here expecting trouble. This meeting is going to wind up in a row with American striker against foreign striker."

Blount's voice broke the stillness again.

"Those spies are in this room, men!" he cried.

He looked toward Dick and Ralph.

Other eyes turned in that direction.

"We'll better beat it for the fire escape, hadn't we, Big Jim?" asked Ralph.

"Wait a minute," said Big Jim again, and added: "We came here expecting we'd have to take drastic action, and we're prepared to do so. The Americans are probably outnumbered three to one by the foreigners, and there are half a dozen agitators who will line up with the aliens. But I guess we can take care of ourselves."

"Now men," went on the agitator Blount, "what shall we do with those spies?"

"Kill 'em!" cried a foreign striker, jumping up and down in his excitement.

Other voices took up the cry.

Shouts of "Where are they?" and "show them to us" in imperfect English filled the hall.

Blount pointed straight at Ralph and Dick.

"There they are men!" he cried. "Don't let them escape."

With a roar the foreigners sprang forward.

The American strikers rose to meet them.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BATTLE.

"COME, Ralph, quick!" cried Dick. "This is none of our trouble. Let's get out."

They started for the nearest fire escape.

But they had delayed too long, although from the rear Big American steel workers were dashing forward to intercept the foreigners, now bearing down on the two lads.

Big Jim's voice rose above the roar.

"Hold 'em, men!" he cried.

The Americans needed no urging.

The first line of foreigners met an impregnable defense as they tried to advance across the aisle.

Apparently neither the foreigners nor the agitators had correctly gauged the temper of the bulk of the American strikers.

This sudden resistance took them by surprise, and for the moment they drew back.

But Blount, the agitator, with the courage de-

serving of a better cause, dashed forward and led them again to the attack.

Big Jim, standing half a head taller than any man in the room except Blount, pushed forward.

"Let me through here!" roared Big Jim.

The other Americans made way, and Big Jim advanced to the outer fringe of the crowd. Then he dashed directly at Blount.

"Come to me, Blount, if you want to fight!" Big Jim thundered.

Blount took one look at Big Jim, then endeavored to push his way into the crowd of foreigners.

But Big Jim was not to be denied.

"Keep 'em off my back, men!" he shouted, as he plunged after the agitator.

Others of the Americans pressed into the ranks of the foreigners in Big Jim's wake.

"Get him, Henderson!" cried a voice.

Big Jim stretched forth his left hand and seized Blount by the shoulder. Then, exerting all his strength, he literally dragged the agitator over the heads of the foreigners, and set him down in the aisle.

Then he drew back his right fist and struck out heavily.

Meanwhile Ralph and Dick, finding they could not force their way through the struggling crowd to the fire escape, let themselves be carried along into

the aisle with the others. Therefore, they were close to Big Jim as he set Blount down in the aisle.

As if by common consent, all other hostilities ceased as Big Jim launched his fist at Blount.

But with an agility which Big Jim had not believed possible in a man of Blount's bulk, the agitator ducked Big Jim's fist, and stepping in close planted a heavy blow over Big Jim's heart.

Big Jim gave a grunt and staggered back.

With a cry of encouragement to the foreigners, Blount followed up this advantage and drew a red stream from Big Jim's nose with a hard left.

A cry of dismay went up from the Americans and it seemed that they would launch themselves into the fray again.

But Big Jim Henderson was far from a beaten man. Even as he fought he took in the situation.

For the moment, he knew, while he was engaged with Blount singlehanded, general hostilities had ceased. If the Americans were permitted to rush into the fight, the struggle soon would be raging again all over the room.

So, as the Americans prepared to renew the battle, he stayed them with a shout.

"Stand back, men!" he cried.

The American advance stopped.

Blount, having landed two hard blows on his opponent, now was more confident. He continued to press Big Jim hard, and the latter retreated slowly.

"Great Scott, Ralph!" cried Dick. "Big Jim's going to get licked."

But Ralph, who was a bit closer to their big friend, had caught the crafty look in the latter's eyes.

"Don't you believe it, Dick," he replied. "Big Jim can lick two like him."

"Well, he'll have to hurry," declared Dick.

Even as the lad spoke, Big Jim's retreat stopped suddenly. He took a single step forward and struck heavily.

Blount staggered back as Big Jim's right fist connected with the point of his jaw in a perfect uppercut.

For the moment Dick forgot where he was. The possibility of danger to himself had left his mind.

"Hurray!" he cried, as Blount sprawled on the floor.

"Knock out!" shouted Ralph.

But Ralph was wrong.

After delivering his blow, Big Jim stepped back and gave his opponent an opportunity to get up.

The agitator arose slowly.

"Had enough, Blount?" asked Big Jim.

Blount scowled.

"I can lick you any time," he declared.

"Hop to it, then," said Big Jim.

Blount sprang forward.

Once more Big Jim timed his punch accurately,

and again his fist reached the point of the agitator's chin.

Down went the man again.

Cheers went up from the American throats.

Again Big Jim stepped back and let Blount get to his feet.

"Had enough?" he asked for the second time.

Apparently Blount had not had enough. With an angry cry he sprang forward again.

For the third time, Big Jim measured his man and struck out savagely.

And for the third time Blount fell heavily to the floor.

But this time he did not get up.

Big Jim reached down, and with his left hand dragged the agitator to his feet. The man was conscious, but in no mood to continue the fight.

"Had enough?" demanded Big Jim.

Blount made no reply, and Big Jim shook him as a cat would a mouse.

"Had enough?" he asked again.

Blount nodded affirmatively.

"Say it!" cried Big Jim.

Blount hesitated no more as Big Jim raised his fist.

"Don't hit me again!" he cried.

"Then say you've had enough."

"I've had enough," said Blount sullenly.

Big Jim released his hold.

"All right," he said. "Now listen to me. We've had enough of you and your kind in Wilmercairn. We're decent people here, and I intend to stay awhile. But the town won't hold you and me both, Hear me?"

"I hear you," growled Blount.

"Then see that you heed, feller. Now, I'm going to give you twenty-four hours to get out of town. If I run into you after that I'm going to thrash you so your mother won't know you."

Blount started to reply, but Big Jim silenced him with a gesture.

"I don't want to hear a word out of you," he said angrily. "Now, call you 'Hunkie' friends there and tell them to get out of the hall."

Blount did so, and when the last of the foreigners had taken his departure, Big Jim dragged Blount to the door and through the hall, and sent him rolling down the steps with a kick.

Big Jim's face was red with anger and he came into the hall.

"I guess that will be the end of Blount," he said to the other Americans, who gathered around him. "Now, if we can just chase the rest of his ilk out of town maybe we can have a little peace. As you all know, I'm a peaceable man and I don't want anybody around here who is likely to stir me up."

His anger had cooled by this time and he grinned at Dick and Ralph.

"Guess I must have lost my temper," he said.

"Rather," said Dick dryly.

"Well," said Ralph, "the 'Hunkies' have gone and the agitators with them. But is that going to put an end to the attempt to seize the mill?"

"I don't know about that," said an American near him, "but I'm afraid not."

"And what are you Americans going to do about it?" Dick demanded. "Are you going to stand by and let them get away with it?"

Big Jim brought his right fist down in the palm of his left hand with a resounding smack.

"Dash it, no!" he shouted. "We can't stand for that. Why, where would our jobs be with these 'Hunkies' running the mill? No sir! And I'll tell you another thing, if the mill is going to resume this week, I, for one, am going to try and get my old job back. Who's with me?"

Jerry Eagan was the first to answer.

"I am, Uncle Jim!" he cried and sprang to Big Jim's side.

"So am I!" cried a man at Dick's left.

"Count me in Henderson!" said another.

And man after man came forward.

Dick and Ralph grinned happily.

"By Jove!" said Dick. "Looks like this strike might end sooner than I expected."

But Ralph shook his head.

"The strike will still be on even if all the Americans return to work," he said.

"But maybe they won't need the strikebreakers now."

"That's possible enough," Ralph admitted. "But you'll find these foreigners hanging around the mills trying to make trouble for all the loyal workmen. Why, they're liable to turn snipers and pick the Americans off from their homes as they go to and from work."

And, as events turned out, Ralph was right.

CHAPTER XXI.

BACK TO WORK.

EARLY the following morning Ralph was summoned to the telephone. Big Jim's voice came over the wire.

"Hello, Big Jim," said Ralph. "What can I do for you this morning?"

"Can you and Dick come to my house right away?"

"Sure; what's up?"

"I'll explain when you get here. Try and come as soon as you can, will you?"

"Be there in half an hour, Big Jim."

The lad hung up the receiver.

He acquainted Dick with the nature of the conversation, and they hurried to Big Jim's house, where they arrived well within the specified time.

To their surprise they found assembled half a dozen others of the American strikers, including Brandon, the chairman of the meeting the night before.

Big Jim introduced the boys to all the men.

"Now Brandon," he said, "you tell them why we asked them to come here this morning."

"I suppose," said Brandon, addressing both lads, "that you are interested in seeing the end of this strike?"

Both lads nodded, and Brandon went on:

"As you know, we decided last night—that is, most of us did—that we will have nothing further to do with the foreign strikers—that we are ready to go back to work if the officials will let us."

Again the lads nodded, but said nothing.

"Well," said Brandon, "we want some one to acquaint the mill officials with our decision, and we thought perhaps you would be willing to take our message."

"We'll be only too glad to," declared Dick, "but the best we can do is to tell the officials that you wish a conference."

"That's my plan exactly," said Brandon. "Tell Mr. Lang or the general manager that a committee

has been appointed to confer with the officials at any time and place they may designate. You will do this for us?"

"Certainly," was Dick's reply, "and I believe that we had better get busy at once."

"That's the ticket, young feller," Big Jim put in. "When you find out what the officials have to say, come back and let us know, will you?"

"We certainly shall. Come, Ralph."

The lads left Big Jim's house and turned their faces toward the mill.

As it happened, the same man who had admitted them the day before was on guard at the main entrance, so they had no difficulty getting in.

Inside the office, they asked a clerk,—far more pleasant than Hinton, the dismissed clerk, had been the day before,—for an interview with either the president, vice-president or the general manager. After a wait of perhaps five minutes they were shown into the private office of the latter.

"So you're back again," said the general manager after they had exchanged a few pleasantries. "I understand from Lovitt that you attended the meeting of the strikers last night."

"Yes, sir," returned Ralph, "and it is as a result of that meeting that we are here again this morning."

"So?" said Mr. Zachary. "And pray what bearing can that have on your visit?"

"Just this," was Ralph's reply: "We bear a message from the American strikers asking for a conference preparatory to their coming back to work."

The general manager, who was leaning back in his chair with both feet on his desk, brought his feet down with a crash.

"What!" he ejaculated.

Both boys smiled, for they could well understand his surprise.

"That's it, sir," said Dick. "The Americans among the strikers want their jobs back."

"One minute," said the general manager, and touched an electric button on his desk.

In response to this summons, a clerk appeared.

"Ask Mr. Lang and Mr. Lovitt to come to my office immediately," the general manager instructed the clerk.

The man withdrew.

There was silence in the general manager's office until the president and vice-president of the plant entered the room.

They exchanged greetings with Dick and Ralph, and Mr. Zachary motioned them to seats.

"More news?" asked Mr. Lang as he sat down.

"Rather," replied the general manager dryly.

"I hope it is good news," said the vice-president. "We've heard enough of the other kind."

"Well, it all depends on your point of view," said

the general manager. "To me it sounds like good news."

"What is it, Zachary?" asked Mr. Lang.

"Why, said the general manager, "the American strikers want to come back to work."

Both Mr. Lang and Mr. Lovitt were on their feet in a second.

"What's that?" cried the former.

"You can't mean it!" exclaimed the latter.

"But I do," said the general manager. "I have the word of these lads for it."

The other two mill officials turned on the boys.

"Explain," directed Mr. Lang.

Dick did so.

"Well," said the vice-president when they had concluded. "I guess we can confer with the committee at once, eh Lang?"

"We mustn't be too hasty," was the president's reply. "We'll have to know first what terms the men will come back on."

"That's the question to be settled at the conference, Lang," said the general manager.

"Exactly, sir," said Ralph. "We know nothing of the terms on which you are willing to take the men back, nor what the men themselves want. They simply asked us to bring this message to you and to return with your answer."

"Fair enough," said Mr. Lovitt.

Still President Lang seemed undecided.

"See here, Lang," said the general manager leaning forward in his chair; "don't be bull-headed about this."

"I'm not bull-headed," the president protested, "but in your eagerness to get the old men back you are overlooking one thing."

"And that?" queried the general manager.

"The strikebreakers. They're due here tonight, you know."

"That's so, Zachary," the vice-president put in. "I had forgotten about them."

"Well, I hadn't," declared Mr. Zachary.

"But the strikers won't return if we let the strikebreakers go to work," said the president.

"I agree with you there, Lang," said Mr. Lovitt.

"I didn't expect they would," said the general manager.

"Then how do you figure to smooth things over?"

"Why, that's easy enough. We'll meet the strikebreakers at the train, pay 'em a week's salary and head 'em east again."

"Hm-m," said the vice-president. "I suppose that can be done, Lang."

"I'm not sure how the strikebreakers would take to that kind of treatment," said the president.

"They'll have to be satisfied," the general manager explained. "Besides, they'll be glad to draw a week's pay apiece without turning their hands over."

"Maybe so," said the president, "but I'm not convinced."

"Well, Lang," said Mr. Lovitt, "why not arrange the conference with the men and cross the other bridge when we come to it?"

"My idea exactly," declared the general manager.

"Where will we hold this conference?" asked the president.

"Anywhere," said Mr. Zachary. "Here, if the men would care to come to the mill."

"Suits me," said the vice-president.

"When?"

"Well, say at 11 o'clock. It's only a little after nine now. Come, Lang, what do you say?"

The president of the steel mill smiled.

"I guess it doesn't make much difference what I say," he declared. "I'm out-voted any way you figure it. I'll have to give in, of course."

"Good!" said the general manager, "then we'll see the strikers' committee here in my office at eleven o'clock."

Ralph and Dick got to their feet preparatory to taking their departure.

"By the way," said Mr. Lovitt, "how big is this committee?"

Dick shook his head.

"I don't know, sir," he replied. "There were about half a dozen men in Big Jim's house when we got there this morning."

"I guess the size of the committee won't make any difference, Lovitt," said the president. "As long as we agree to see them I don't see that it signifies whether there are three or six."

"I'm sure they'll send any number of men you suggest, sir," Dick put in.

But Mr. Lang shook his head.

"That's up to them," he declared.

"Well, boys," said the general manager, "if we're to hold this conference this morning, you'd better be getting back. They'll probably want to discuss matters among themselves before they come to the mill."

"All right, sir."

"Another thing," said the general manager. "You boys seem to be quite a bit mixed up in this matter. I'm sure we will offer no objections if you wish to attend the conference. And I'm sure the strikers' committee also will be glad to have you."

"Thank you sir," said Ralph. "We certainly should be pleased to be present."

They left the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONFERENCE.

The striking Americans were elated when Dick and Ralph returned with word that their mission had been successful, for there were those among them who had feared the mill officials would not receive them.

They spent the time until just before leaving for the conference discussing the situation, and when the time came to go, they asked the lads to accompany them.

As it developed, the strikers' committee was composed of only four men, with Big Jim at their head. It was Big Jim who would act as spokesman. Others on the committee were Brandon, and two others named Lawrence and Ashcroft.

The officials were awaiting the men when they reached the mill and they were escorted at once to the office of the general manager. There they all took seats around a table which had been installed after the lads left the mill earlier in the day.

General Manager Zachary acted as spokesman for the officials.

"Well, men," he said, after all had taken seats and cigars had been passed around, "we're glad that you have come to realize the folly of allowing yourselves to be led by a few agitators and putting yourselves in the class of the striking foreigners. We're glad you've asked for this conference, and I want to assure you we will try and meet you half way as to terms."

The general manager sat down.

"As to terms, sir," said Big Jim, "we haven't anything to demand other than we be reinstated in good standing, and that you rescind your decision to employ strikebreakers. Outside of the latter, we'd like to come back as we were before."

"No demand for pay loss during the time of the strike?" asked President Lang.

"No, sir. We lost that money through our own fault. There is no reason why you should pay for the time we were idle."

"And when would you be ready to return to work?"

"In the morning if you wish, sir."

"Reasonable enough," declared the vice-president. "I see no reason why we should argue over that."

"Nor I," said Mr. Zachary.

"One moment," said Mr. Lang. "Of course you all realize that the plant cannot resume full operation with the return of the American strikers alone."

"That's true," Big Jim admitted.

"What then?" asked the president. "I suppose that you understand it was our intention to import sufficient strikebreakers to operate at full capacity?"

Big Jim shook his head.

"We can't work alongside strikebreakers," he growled.

"Hold on, now," said Mr. Lang. "I didn't ask you to. I'm simply stating a fact. You realize that I'm right, don't you?"

"I do," replied Big Jim.

"Well, then, will you men be willing to put in a little overtime if necessary?"

Big Jim consulted with his fellow committeemen. At last he said:

"Yes, sir, we will, with regular pay for overtime."

"That's satisfactory to me," the president declared. "And you say you are ready to work in the morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Then, so far as I am concerned, the matter is settled."

"I'm satisfied," declared the vice-president.

"And it's all right with me," declared the general manager. He glanced toward Dick and Ralph, who sat back from the table. "And I want to say to all of you, that for an amicable settlement of this strike so far as the officials and the American strikers is concerned these two boys here are in a good measure responsible."

"You're right, sir," said Big Jim emphatically.

Both lads arose and bowed.

"I thank you sir," said Dick.

"We both thank you, sir," said Ralph.

"Henderson," said the general manager, "there is just one more matter."

"And that, sir?" questioned Big Jim.

"What's the attitude of the foreign strikers, now that you men have agreed to return to work. What will they do?"

Big Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"Whatever they do doesn't worry me," he declared. "We Americans are perfectly able to take care of ourselves."

"Perhaps so. But how about the mill? It is still in danger. I suppose it will still be necessary to maintain guards."

"We have no objections to that," replied Big Jim.

"What's this story I hear about the foreigners and agitators planning to seize the mill?"

"Well, it's true enough, sir," said Big Jim, "but whether they'll go through with the attempt I can't say. I suppose they had counted on our support, and now that they've lost that they may remain quiet; but you can't be sure of that, sir."

"That's true. Do they know when the strike-breakers were due to arrive?"

"I believe so."

"Where'd they get their information?"

"I can't say as to that."

"But you believe if an attempt is made to seize the mill, it probably will be made tonight?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Then I've a proposition to make to you."

"We're listening, sir," said Big Jim respectfully.

The general manager seemed lost in thought for some moments, but directly he continued:

"You've told me you men were ready to come to work in the morning. All well and good, but why not make it tonight?"

"Tonight?" exclaimed Big Jim.

"Yes, but not to work, I mean. We have arms a-plenty here, but not as many guards as we should have. Now, in the event that the strikers plan to seize the mill tonight, we'd like to have you help in driving them off. What do you say?"

Big Jim hesitated.

"We hadn't considered anything like that, sir," he replied at length. "I'll have to consult with the others before answering, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Zachary. "You may retire into the next room, if you wish."

The strikers' committee did so, and it was almost half an hour before they returned.

"Mr. Zachary," said Big Jim, "we've threshed this thing out pretty thoroughly, and while to outsiders it may seem that we have deserted our fellow

strikers—I mean the foreigners, sir—we've come to the conclusion that blood is thicker than water, and that we're on your side from this time on, sir."

General Manager Zachary leaped to his feet and extended a hand.

"By George! I'm certainly glad to hear you talk like that," he cried. "It's given me something to think about. Heretofore, I always looked upon a striker, American or foreign, as not much of a man —particularly if he happened to interfere with my business, I guess," he added with a laugh.

Big Jim smiled.

"I guess you'll find that Americans are pretty much alike the country over," he said. "They may be of different stations in life, but their interests are identical."

"Well, it took you fellows to show it to me," declared the general manager.

"I wish you men would let me say a word," said President Lang at this juncture.

The general manager laughed happily.

"Sorry I've been monopolizing the conversation, Lang," he said, "but I was considerably interested. I withdraw in your favor."

"I haven't much to say," President Lang went on, "except that I admire the spirit of these men here, and the other Americans who have been our opponents in this strike. Zachary, awhile back you told these men we'd meet them half way."

"That's right, I did Lang," the general manager put in.

"All right. Then I'm going to tell them we'll meet them more than half way."

The others looked their surprise, and President Lang continued:

"The men," he said, "have made no demand for wages they have lost as a result of being out on strike. But I'm going to promise them they will get the money just the same."

Big Jim stammered.

"I—we—" he began.

President Lang stayed him with a gesture.

"One moment," he said. "Also, I want the men to know that, effective from the day they went on strike, their wages are hereby raised twenty percent."

The members of the strikers' committee were beyond speech.

This was one of the demands they had made when going on strike.

"I want it understood, of course," said President Lang, "that this applies only to the American strikers. The foreigners may still come back if they wish, but they must return upon the old basis."

Soon after this the strikers' committee arose to go.

"I'll have the men here before dark," Big Jim informed General Manager Zachary; "that is, all of them I can get hold of. Also, it's possible that

some of the married men may not want to come tonight."

"That's all right, Henderson," said the general manager. "Just do the best you can. I'm depending up you."

Big Jim departed.

Several minutes later, Dick and Ralph, after undergoing a profusion of thanks from the mill officials, also left the mill and started home.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THAT NIGHT.

News that the steel strike in Wilmercairn had ended, so far as the American workmen were concerned spread rapidly. But, instead of bringing satisfaction to most of the young people, it served only to increase their fears.

"There will be more fighting now," was the word that was passed on every hand.

Dick and Ralph, after leaving the conference in the plant, went home for lunch. In the afternoon they walked down town again.

As they were walking along Main street, they caught sight of two figures ahead that caused them

to hurry forward. The figures were Mabel and Ethel.

The girls greeted the lads cordially.

After they had walked several blocks, Dick said:

"How about advancing the date for that movie party? I see one open across the street."

"Lovely!" exclaimed Mabel. "We'll be glad to go."

They went, and when the show was over, at Ralph's suggestion, they entered a second theater.

Consequently when they came out it was after five o'clock.

"We'll see you home, if we may," said Ralph gallantly.

"I'm going to the mill and go home with papa," said Mabel. "Ethel, you'd better come too. We can drive you home."

Ethel agreed.

"Then, if you have no objections, we'll walk along with you," Dick volunteered.

"Of course. We'll be delighted to have you."

As they drew close to the mill, the lads noted the presence of many foreigners, and both were glad they had not permitted the girls to come unaccompanied.

The erstwhile American strikers, the lads saw too, were beginning to arrive. Each man was stopped by a guard at the gate and made to identify himself before he was admitted.

Dick, Ralph and the two girls went through the gate unchallenged and entered the office building. Mr. Lovitt appeared in the door as they went in.

"I'll be with you in a minute, Mabel," he called. "Have the boys wait, and we'll take them home."

The four sat down as Mr. Lovitt disappeared in the president's office. They were talking over events of the day, when a sharp report rang out.

Dick and Ralph sprang to their feet and dashed to the door. Mabel and Ethel followed them.

Outside, as the lads emerged into the open, a dozen or so Americans, who had just entered the gate, had turned and were dashing back again.

As Dick was about to dash across the lot he espied Mabel behind him.

"You girls get back inside," he said. "This is no place for you. You may get hurt. I'll go down and see what the trouble is."

"Wait, I'll go with you, Dick," said Ralph, as his chum moved away.

"But can't we go, too?" asked Mabel.

"Certainly not," said Ralph. "Your place is inside where it's safe."

"But you—"

"Mabel, come back here."

Mabel turned at the sound of her father's voice.

"You and Ethel go into my office and wait until I return," said Mr. Lovitt sternly.

This time Mabel did not protest. Accompanied by Ethel, she obeyed her father's injunction.

Meantime, Dick and Ralph had caught up with the other Americans at the gate and inquired the cause of the shot.

"Somebody picked off Walter Fogg as he was coming in the gate," a man explained. "Some of the men went out to bring him in. See, there they come now."

Dick and Ralph saw two men approaching carrying a third figure. One had the inert figure by the feet and the other by the head. The party was surrounded by other Americans.

"Dead?" asked a voice.

"No, I don't think so," replied the man who held the victim's feet.

"Who did it?"

"Don't know."

"Sniper, I guess," declared another. "The shot must have come from one of those houses there," and he indicated a row of dwellings across the street from the steel plant.

General Manager Zachary and the president and vice-president of the company now came dashing forward and inquired the cause of the trouble.

The general manager caught sight of Dick.

"Run back to the office and notify the state police by phone," he instructed the lad.

Dick did so, much as he would like to have stayed to see the outcome of the trouble.

A phone had been installed in the emergency barracks as soon as the state police had been quartered in the city. Dick got Sergeant Jewett on the wire almost immediately, and reported what had happened.

"I'll have a dozen men there in five minutes," said the sergeant, whose force was stationed at the far end of the plant.

The sergeant was as good as his word.

Five minutes later the troop, headed by Tom, dashed up to the gate, where it halted. Tom entered the plant to ascertain the extent of the trouble.

"Man's not badly hurt," said the general manager, who had taken charge of the victim and had him carried to his private office. "Merely a flesh wound. I'll have Doc Thomas look him over. He's still here, fortunately. Then we'll send him home."

But Tom shook his head.

"Not tonight, sir," he replied quietly, "and I must warn the rest of you who are here to remain."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Zachary. "Why?"

"There are several hundred foreigners massed less than two blocks outside the mill, Mr. Zachary. They fired at us as we came along the outside of the fence, but unfortunately none of my men was hit. No, it's as much as your life is worth to venture outside."

"You think they're planning to attack the mill?"

It looks like it, though I would say they are waiting for dark."

The general manager hurried into the office of President Lang, where he found Vice-President Lovitt as well. He explained the situation briefly.

"And we can't go home?" demanded Ralph.

"No," replied Zachary. "The trooper informs me that he will keep his men here to reinforce the guards should there be an attack. Lang, have all the American strikers come back yet?"

"I don't know," replied the president. "Go outside and ask Henderson. I guess he's checking up on them. There he is down by the gate. You can see him from the window."

"I'll go, sir," said Ralph.

The general manager nodded, and Ralph hurried away.

"All the men in, Big Jim?" he asked as he reached his friend's side.

Big Jim shook his head.

"Not all," he replied. "Most of them, though, for I told 'em to come early. I was afraid something like this might happen."

"Tom says the foreigners are massed outside the mill," Ralph went on.

"I saw 'em when I came in."

"Did they shoot at you?"

"No. I slipped in when they weren't looking. Guess they'd like to have a shot at me, though," and Big Jim smiled grimly.

"Instructions are that no one can leave the plant," Ralph went on.

"Perfectly proper. Now you go in there and tell Tom that I'm taking charge of the workmen. There are enough of us, including the guards, to patrol the length of this mill on both sides. But you tell Tom he better keep his men ready to protect the offices. Some of 'em might get through, you know."

"I'll tell him," said Ralph. "Then I'm coming back here."

"Now listen here, young feller," said Big Jim sharply. "I don't want to be bothered with you. Besides, I heard somebody say the vice-president's daughter is back there. If I was your age I'd be more interested in her than a rough worker like me."

"Well, there's another girl there, too," Ralph grinned. "She's the one I'm interested in, if you want to know."

"Then you'd better get back there. One of those foreigners is liable to sneak a bullet through this fence and you won't be interested in nothing any more. So long, young feller."

Ralph left Big Jim and returned to the office, where he hunted up Tom and told him what Big Jim had said.

Tom nodded approvingly.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Are the men armed?"

President Lang, who came up in time to hear the remark, replied:

"No. But we're getting the rifles and ammunition out of the storeroom now. They'll be passed around immediately."

"Good! See that all the men have plenty of ammunition. Ralph, you run back and tell Big Jim that I approve of his plan and that he is in absolute command outside. I'm in charge of the defense until the arrival of Sergeant Jewett."

Ralph obeyed Tom's command, and then returned to the vice-president's office, where he found Dick and the two girls.

"Looks like we're stuck here for the night," said Ralph.

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Ethel. "What an adventure!"

"It's liable to be too much of an adventure before it's over," Ralph said grimly. "By the way Dick, I guess we'd better call up Aunt Mary and tell her we'll be late again."

"I've already done that," was Dick's reply. "She must think it's getting to be pretty much of a habit."

"The thing that worries me," said Ralph, "is how do we eat?"

"Oh, I'll fix that," said Mabel. "There is a store

room here with lots of canned goods. I'll get papa's permission, and we'll have a party here."

"Suits me," declared Dick.

Mabel hurried out to find her father.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A HURRY TRIP.

THE store room was raided for provisions that night, and everybody had a cold dinner. Ethel and Mabel helped make sandwiches which were distributed to the men.

After dinner the officials gathered in Mr. Zachary's private office for a consultation. Tom, in command of the defending forces, and Ralph and Dick were there. So were the two girls, for there was no other place for them to go.

To the general manager's office came Big Jim and demanded speech with the officials. President Lang invited him in and motioned him to a seat.

"How's everything outside, Henderson?" he asked.

"As good as can be expected, sir," replied Big Jim. "I've posted my men at all vulnerable spots, but even at that we're short handed."

President Lang nodded.

"It's too bad, but it can't be helped," he said.

"Perhaps it's not so bad as you think," Tom broke in.

"How's that, Hazelton?"

"Well," said Tom, "Sergeant Jewett who's in command of my troop, is rounding up all available able-bodied men. He's going to swear them in as special officers and come to our assistance. I just had him on the phone."

"But that will take time, Tom," said Dick.

"Of course, but we can hold out long enough for them to get busy, I'm sure."

"That is indeed good news," said the general manager. "But what was it you came to see about, Henderson?"

"The men want to know what you've done about calling off the strikebreakers, sir."

General Manager Zachary leaped to his feet with with an exclamation.

"Hear that, Lang?" he cried. "What have we done? Nothing. In the excitement we seem to have forgotten all about our promise to the men. We'll have to get busy. What time are they due here?"

"Eleven o'clock," replied President Lang. "I don't see how we let it slip our minds."

"But we did," said the general manager dryly, "and now we must take prompt action. Can't we head 'em off some place with a wire?"

"We can reach them all right, but that wouldn't do any good unless we were able to wire Hennessy the money to pay them off."

"Who's Hennessy?" asked Big Jim.

"He's our agent who's bringing the men from New York."

"Can I make a suggestion Mr. Zachary?" asked Dick at this juncture.

"Any suggestion is welcome," was the general manager's reply.

"It's only a quarter past seven now," said Dick. "There's a fast train that passes through here at seven forty. If somebody can catch that he'll reach Johnstown in less than two hours—half an hour before the strike breakers pass through if they're due here at eleven."

"A first rate idea," declared Vice-President Lovitt. "But who can we send? We are all needed here. Besides, somebody will run the risk of being shot by the strikers if he starts for the depot."

"Ralph and I will take the chance if you'll trust us with the money," said Dick quietly.

President Lang hesitated and seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind. Not so the general manager.

"Of course," he said quickly. "Lang, get the money."

"But—" began the president.

"There is no time to hesitate, Lang," said Mr.

Zachary. "We've promised the men we'd head off the strikebreakers, and we must keep our word. There is no time to lose."

"Zachary is right," said Vice-President Lovitt.

President Lang said no more. He stepped quickly out of the room and into the cashier's cage, where he knelt before the safe.

"But how will you reach the station, Dick?" asked Tom.

"That's easy," said Dick. "Mr. Lovitt, can we borrow your car?"

"Certainly."

"Big Jim," Dick went on. "You go down to the gate and be ready to swing it open when you see us coming."

Big Jim nodded his understanding of the proceedings and left the room.

"I don't know what may happen to your car, Mr. Lovitt," said Dick. "It may get shot full of holes, or smashed up."

"Don't worry about the car," said the vice-president, "but be very careful of yourselves."

"Do you mean to tell me you are going to let Dick and Ralph take all the chances, father?" demanded Mabel at this point.

"It seems best, daughter," was Mr. Lovitt's reply. "The rest of us may be needed to defend the mill."

"Pshaw!" said Ralph. "It'll be fun. We'll get back safely all right."

"But—" began Mabel.

"Here's the money," said President Lang, returning and placing several fat packages of bills in Dick's hands.

The boy stuffed the money into his pockets.

"Now for your machine, Mr. Lovitt," said Dick quietly.

"This way, young man."

The lads bade Mabel and Ethel a hurried farewell. Tom accompanied them as they followed the vice-president outside the building.

The automobile, a long, low car showing signs of great speed, stood near. Dick took his place at the wheel. Ralph sat calmly down beside him.

"Be careful, Dick," Tom warned.

"All right, Tom. We'll come through all right. Don't worry. Ready Ralph?"

"All right, Dick."

"Then let's go. So long everybody. Look out!"

The machine dashed toward the gate at high speed.

As they drew near the gate swung open and the automobile went careening out.

Ralph turned and waved at Big Jim as they flashed by. Big Jim waved a hand in return.

Around the first corner shot the car at break-neck speed, and there, on both sides of the street, Dick caught his first sight of the swarm of armed foreigners.

"No help for it," he told himself. "We'll have to run the gauntlet."

Bending low and grasping the wheel more firmly, Dick increased the speed of the car.

Came a series of scattered shots which splattered against the front of the car.

And then the machine was directly in the heart of the strikers.

Again firearms flashed, but the car sped safely by.

Angry men rushed to the midddle of the street and fired wildly after the fast-disappearing car. The shots peppered the machine, but none found a vital spot.

Dick reduced the speed of the car and sent it crazily around the next corner.

"All right, Ralph?" he called, fearing to take his eyes from the road ahead even for a minute.

"All right, Dick. And you?"

"Never touched me. I guess we're safe now."

Dick reduced the speed of the car even more and they proceeded along leisurely.

"Think they'll give chase?" asked Ralph.

"I think not. They don't know why we took this chance."

"They may, though."

"Let 'em. We can run away from anything they can produce."

"Trouble is we don't want to run far. We want

to catch this train. By the way, are you sure it stops here?"

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of that," declared Dick.

He stepped on the accelerator again, and the car leaped forward.

"Hey! What's the idea?" demanded Ralph.

"We've got to make sure the train stops. We'll ask the ticket agent and if it isn't scheduled to stop we'll have him flag her."

"Maybe he won't do it.

"I guess he will when he understands the situation."

Five minutes later the machine pulled up in front of the station and the lads leaped out and ran into the depot. There they bought tickets and consulted the agent.

"No, doesn't stop here," said the agent. "You'll have to wait for the nine o'clock."

"We can't," said Dick, and briefly outlined the situation to the ticket agent.

"I'll stop her," said that worthy briefly.

He stepped to the phone and got the signal tower on the line.

"It's all right," he said at last replacing the receiver and coming forward. "She'll stop just down the track to the right. Towerman says he'll set the block against her until you're aboard."

"Thanks," said Dick.

The lads hurried a short distance down the track and waited.

Their wait was not long, however, and five minutes later the fast express came thundering toward them.

Two short blasts of the locomotive's whistle told them the engineer had perceived the danger signal. Directly the train came to a stop, and a brakeman dropped to the ground.

"What's wrong ahead?" he asked of the two lads, as they approached.

"We wanted to get aboard, that's all," replied Dick with a grin. "You can go ahead."

"Well, I'll be blowed!" exclaimed the brakeman. "I—"

A blast of the locomotive whistle interrupted him.

"All clear ahead," the sound told him.

He swung up the steps after the lads as the train began to move again.

Dick and Ralph walked ahead to the smoking car, where they found a vacant seat. They settled down comfortable.

"Well, we made it by the skin of our teeth," said Ralph. "Hope we get into Johnstown on time."

"Right, Ralph. And then to find the strikebreakers' train and locate Hennessy."

"Sure you've got that money all safe, Dick?"

Dick clapped a hand to first one pocket and then another.

"All safe," he replied.

The train gathered speed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STRIKEBREAKERS.

THE train made no stops before it reached Johnstown, and when the boys alighted in the Flood City it still lacked a few minutes of nine.

From the passenger agent they found out that the train carrying the strikebreakers was reported half an hour late and would not arrive for at least thirty minutes.

"How about a cup of coffee, Ralph?" asked Dick.

"Good idea. Those sandwiches in the mill didn't altogether satisfy me."

"Nor me."

The boys repaired to a little restaurant near the station, where they disposed of two cups of coffee and two slices of pie each. Then they returned to the station.

"Fifteen minutes yet," said Dick, after a glance at the station clock.

They strolled out on the platform.

It was just nine thirty when the train rolled in.

"How are we going to find Hennessy?" asked Ralph.

"Pick out the car that has the roughest looking gang in it," said Dick. "He'll probably be among them."

"We'll have to hurry, too, if we want these fellows to get off here," said Ralph. "The train only stops a few minutes."

The lads entered the smoker when the train stopped. It was filled with a motley looking crew.

"Looks like the right car," said Ralph hopefully.

"We'll try a call," said Dick.

He raised his voice.

"Mr. Hennessy here?" he called.

Curious eyes gazed at the two lads, but no one answered.

"Let's try the next car, Dick," said Ralph.

They hurried back, and again Dick called out:

"Is Mr. Hennessy in this car?"

A big rough looking man left his seat and came forward.

"My name's Hennessy," he said. "What do you want?"

"Are you taking these strikebreakers to Wilmercairn?" asked Dick.

The man glared at the boy.

"Why?" he demanded.

Because I come from President Lang. He wants to cancel your engagement."

"What! Cancel our job? I guess not. How do you get that way? It cost us money to get out here, and we want our pay."

"I've the money for you here in my pocket," said Dick.

The man eyed Dick quizically.

"How do I know this is not a trick to keep us out of Wilmercairn?" he asked.

"You'll have to take my word for that," replied Dick. "The strike has been settled so far as the American workers are concerned. They've gone back to work."

"But if this should be a trick it would get me in bad," said Hennessy. "I promised Lang I'd have my men there tonight. Of course if he is willing to give us all a week's pay and tell us to go about our business, it's all right with me. But I don't want to be tricked into throwing him down."

Dick looked Hennessy straight in the eye.

"You can take my word that it's not a trick," he said simply.

Hennessy bent a steadfast gaze on Dick.

"I believe you, youngster," he said at last. "Give me the money and I'll order my men off right here."

Dick produced the several packages of bills, which Hennessy counted rapidly.

"All right and something to spare," he said. "We'll get off."

He raised his voice.

"Men," he began, "we'll get—"

And just then the train began to move.

Ralph gave an exclamation of alarm.

"You're too late?" he exclaimed.

"Get the conductor!" shouted Dick. "Stop the train!"

"Hold on, now, son," said Hennessy. "Don't you lose your heads. I'll take care of this matter all right."

"But we're moving!" said Ralph excitedly.

"What of it?" demanded Hennessy. "We can get off some place else, can't we?"

Dick dropped weakly into a seat and smiled foolishly.

"I never thought of that," he said.

Ralph too looked sheepish.

"Neither did I," he confessed.

"Just keep your shirts on, boys," said Hennessy. "Here comes the conductor. I'll have a word with him."

He halted the train official.

"What's your next stop?" he asked.

"Greensburg."

"How soon?"

"Forty or fifty minutes."

"All right," said Hennessy, and the conductor passed on.

"Didn't even ask us for tickets," said Dick.

"Guess that shouldn't worry you," grinned Hennessy. "I'll get my men out at Greensburg."

He passed through the car, rousing the men who were half asleep in their seats. Having awakened every man in the first car, he passed on into the smoker, where he went through with the same performance.

"Don't know where we'll spend the night," he said to the boys with a grin. "Maybe jail, but I guess they'll make out somehow when I split up this money."

"You're not going to pay them until they get off, are you?" asked Dick.

"Why?"

"Well, if you give them the money now some of them may refuse to leave the train."

"That's so, too," Hennessy admitted. "Then I won't pay them until we leave the train."

"I wish you wouldn't," said Dick.

"Though I'd like to see the man who refused to do what I told him," Hennessy went on aggressively.

"But just help us out that much, won't you?" asked Ralph.

"Sure."

Hennessy again passed among his men, while

Ralph and Dick sat down where they could watch him. And directly Hennessy took a seat near them.

And after awhile a brakeman stuck his head in the door and called out:

"Greensburg."

Immediately Hennessy, who seemed to have been nodding, was on his feet and moving rapidly up and down the aisle.

"All out, men!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Here's where we get out. Hustle, now!"

The sleepy men moved down the aisle toward the door.

Hennessy dashed into the next car where he managed to get the others to their feet.

The train stopped.

Hennessy stood back in the vestibule while the strikebreakers descended. The men got down slowly.

The conductor hurried up to Hennessy.

"Hey! This is not where you want to get out," he cried. "Your tickets read to Wilmercairn."

Hennessy looked at the conductor coldly.

"I know where I want to get off," he said.

"But I tell you—"

"You don't have to tell me."

The conductor gave him one long contemptuous look, shrugged his shoulders and moved on.

Hennessy grinned at the two boys who stood near him.

"Conductor thinks I'm a fool," he said. "Well, maybe I am for taking your word that everything is all right, but somehow I believe you told me the truth."

"We certainly did," Ralph declared.

"For your own good I hope so. But if you've tricked me I promise I'll get even with you some day, and then some."

"Don't worry," said Dick. "It won't be necessary."

The last man in line had now left the train. Hennessy took one last look in each car and moved toward the steps himself.

"All out, I guess," he said.

The train began to move.

"Better drop off or you'll get hurt," said Dick.

"Now, don't you worry about me, son. I just stopped to repeat that if you've tricked me—"

"Rats!" exclaimed Dick. "You know we haven't."

Once more Hennessy looked long and earnestly at the lad while the train gathered speed.

"No, I guess you haven't," he said.

He swung out from the steps.

"Well, so long," he said, and dropped off.

Dick and Ralph re-entered the smoker, virtually deserted now, and sat down. Both breathed a sigh of relief.

"And that's done," said Dick. "It was simpler

than I thought it would be. Mr. Lang should have given me a letter to Hennessy—his signature or something as an evidence of good faith."

"You're right. It was just an off chance that Hennessy believed we were telling the truth."

"But he did, and that's what counts."

Ralph grinned.

"It certainly was a hard looking bunch," he declared.

"So it was," Dick agreed. "And Hennessy was the hardest looking one in the crowd. I'm glad they're gone."

"Same here. Well, I wonder how the folks at the mill are making out?"

"Hard to say, but we'll know soon enough now."

"Yes," Dick agreed. "Won't be long before we're there; and I'll be glad of it, if you ask me."

"Mabel has probably been taken home by this time," said Ralph.

"Now what do you mean by that?" said Dick, flushing, and sitting up.

Ralph leaned back comfortably in his seat. "Oh, nothing," he grinned.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE HANDS OF THE STRIKERS.

It was almost midnight when Dick and Ralph alighted from the train in Wilmercairn.

"What now, Dick?" asked Ralph. "Back to the mill?"

"Guess we'd better get somebody on the phone first and see what the situation is," was Dick's reply.

There was a pay telephone in the waiting room of the station. Dick dropped a nickel in the slot and put the receiver to his ear.

A few moments later a voice came over the wire.

"Hello!" it said.

"Hello," said Dick. "I want to talk to Tom Hazelton of the state police, if he's there."

There was a pause, and directly Dick heard Tom's voice.

"That you Dick?" asked Tom.

"Yes."

"What luck?"

"Good. The strikebreakers left the train at Greensburg. How are things at the mill?"

"Bad. The strikers attacked an hour after you

left and there has been skirmishing ever since. We're holding our own, though."

"What of Sergeant Jewett? Hasn't he rounded up the citizens and sworn them in yet?"

"That's slow work. I had him on the phone a little while ago, and he said he wouldn't be able to do much before morning. He doesn't want to attack the strikers unless he is absolutely sure of success. He's right about that, of course. We're keeping in close touch with him, and if we should need assistance badly he'll come to the rescue with what men he has now."

"I see. But don't you figure the strikers will draw off before daylight?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, shall we come back to the mill or what?"

"No. Chances are you couldn't get through the strikers' lines. You couldn't do any good here, anyhow. You go home or else report to Sergeant Jewett. He's making headquarters at the Schenley House."

"All right. By the way, are the girls still there?"

"Yes, and they've both been considerably worried about you. They'll be glad to know you are safe."

"All right, Tom. See you later then. Good luck."

"The same to you. But take my advice and go home."

Dick replaced the receiver and turned to Ralph.

"Tom said for us to go home," he explained. "Says he doesn't believe we could get through the strikers."

"We got through them coming out," Ralph protested.

"From what Tom says their lines have advanced closer to the mill. It would be more difficult to get back. Besides, as Tom says, we couldn't do a whole lot of good there."

"Any casualties?" asked Ralph.

"I didn't ask, and Tom didn't say. Guess the best thing is to take Tom's advice and go home."

"That means we'll miss all the fun," Ralph declared. "How about looking around a bit first?"

Dick hesitated.

"I don't suppose Tom would approve," he said at last, "but I don't see where it can do any harm. But we'll have to keep out of sight of the strikers."

"I guess we can do that all right, Dick."

"Then come on."

The boys left the railroad station and headed toward the mill.

Dick glanced around.

"Somebody's got Mr. Lovitt's car," he said, noticing that the automobile was not where they had left it before boarding the train for Johnstown.

Ralph shrugged.

"You didn't expect it would stay there all night, did you?" he asked.

"Well, I didn't know."

As they went forward, the occasional sound of firearms came to their ears.

"They're still at it, apparently," said Ralph.

"Snipers, probably, trying to pick off the guards in the darkness," was Dick's reply.

"Well, we won't want to let them get a shot at us."

"We'll keep in the shadow of the houses."

As they drew close to the southern extremity of the steel company plant, the interval between the shots became less. Once there was a veritable volley.

"That must be from the mill," said Dick.

"Sounds like it," Ralph agreed. "Say, don't you think we had better hunt up Sergeant Jewett and offer our services?"

"Tom said we could do that if we wished. Let's get a little closer to the mill and have a look around first."

"Suits me."

A short distance ahead now, the lads could make out the figures of the strikers as they darted back and forth across the street. Occasionally they saw a man raise his rifle and fire toward the mill.

Suddenly Dick grasped Ralph by the arm and drew his back in the shadow of the house.

"What's the matter?" asked Ralph.

"Man coming this way. Keep quiet."

The figure shuffled toward them. As he passed a house from which a light streamed, Dick recognized him.

"Blount!" the lad ejaculated in a low voice.

"Let's grab him, Dick!" exclaimed Ralph.

"Afraid he's too big for us," replied Dick.

"Not for both of us. We'll take him by surprise. He's probably armed. If we can get his gun we've got him."

"What'll we do with him then?"

"Turn him over to Sergeant Jewett. He's one of the leaders of the strikers. With him out of the way the strike may die out."

"All right, then, but we must be careful. Quiet. Here he is."

Blount passed the two lads apparently with no thought of danger. He looked neither to right nor left as he walked along the dark street.

Suddenly he felt a pair of arms seize him around the neck, and he felt the weight of a body on his back, bearing him down.

With an angry cry Blount turned upon his unseen antagonist.

As he did so another figure darted upon him. Blount's hand went to his coat pocket, but the hand of his second enemy beat him to the weapon.

The figure on his back dropped off and Blount found himself looking into the muzzle of his own revolver.

"Hands up!" said Dick quietly.

For a moment it seemed that the agitator would disregard the lad's command, but apparently he thought better of it, for he slowly raised his hands above his head.

"The spies!" he exclaimed.

Dick grinned in the darkness.

"Call us what you please," he replied. "We've got you safe enough, at all events."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Turn you over to Sergeant Jewett of the state police. I guess he'll know how to keep you out of mischief in the future."

"Look here, boy," said Blount. "Why can't we come to an understanding."

"Understanding?" said Dick. "What sort of an understanding?"

"Why, I've got a pretty good roll of bills in my pocket, and if this strike is successful I'll be a man of importance. Now if—"

"That's enough!" cried Dick sharply. "Trying to bribe me, eh? Well, it won't do, Mr. Blount. Now turn around and walk ahead of me. And keep your hands in the air. Don't think I won't shoot if I have to."

Again Blount sought to temporize.

"I—" he began.

But again Dick cut him short.

"March," he said quietly.

Blount marched.

Both lads felt considerably elated as they walked along behind their prisoner. The capture was an important one, and they realized it. But in their excitement occasioned by the catch, they became careless, and this fact cost them dear.

They had gone perhaps two blocks from the place of the capture, when they saw half a dozen figures coming toward them.

"Hadn't we better turn off and dodge these fellows, Dick?" asked Ralph.

"I don't think so. Chances are they're not strikers. They are too far from the mill."

"But it's best to be on the safe side."

"You've got that gun, haven't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then what are you worrying about. Shoot the first man that interferes with you. But I don't think we'll be bothered. Just walk on as though you feared nothing."

Ralph shrugged, but said no more.

As the first of the half dozen figures came up to them, it appeared that Dick was right and they would not be molested.

Three of the men passed on.

Ralph breathed a sigh of relief, but it caught in his throat. One of the other three men stepped up to him.

"What's going on here?" he asked in broken English.

At that moment Blount raised a cry.

"Help!" he shouted.

Ralph felt his pistol arm seized from behind in a powerful grip.

Realizing that he had been outwitted, he shook himself loose and cried:

"Run, Dick!"

Dick followed instructions and took to his heels. Not so Ralph. Before he could take two steps a figure seized him and held him helpless.

His captor was Blount.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DICK'S ESCAPE.

"CATCH the other one, men!" shouted Blount.

Dick, hearing the sound of footsteps behind him, put forth his best effort.

He dashed around the first corner at full speed, thinking he would double back and head for the Schenley house and Sergeant Jewett.

As he neared the next street, however, he found

his escape in that direction cut off by a crowd of foreigners that just then hove in sight.

Dick turned to the left.

He was now headed directly toward the mill.

Before him he saw other strikers. Glancing over his shoulder as he ran, he perceived additional enemies.

"I'll trust to luck," said Dick.

He slowed down and approached the strikers ahead at a walk. These, fortunately, were not aware of what had transpired and paid no attention to the lad. He might have been one of their number for all they seemed to care.

But Dick saw that they were all armed.

As Dick walked on he looked about him. There appeared to be hundreds of figures in the narrow streets. Dick pushed through them and drew closer to the mill.

There he found a clear space beyond which the strikers had not dared advance. The iron fence surrounding the mill faced him invitingly.

"If I were just in there," he told himself.

To think with Dick was to act.

He cast one quick glance behind him, and then dashed for a gate in the mill fence.

As he did so he heard cries of alarm behind him. Ahead, a guard behind the fence raised his rifle and fired at the lad. Dick felt the air of a bullet as it whizzed overhead.

"Don't shoot!" shouted Dick. "I'm a friend."

The guard was undecided whether the figure advancing toward him was friend or foe, but as the strikers held their distance behind Dick the guard stayed his hand.

Dick dashed up to the gate panting.

"Let me in," he cried.

The guard hesitated.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Hazelton, brother of the state trooper in command here," Dick explained hurriedly. "I'm just back from Johnstown."

"Oh," said the guard, and unbarred the gate.

Dick slipped in, and the guard hastened to bar the gate again and take shelter behind a large post.

As he did so half a dozen shots flew near. The guard dragged Dick down beside him.

"Careful," he warned. "They don't shoot very straight, fortunately, but a stray bullet might hit you."

"Oh, I could have brought you down," said the guard. "But you were by yourself, and I shot over your head to scare you back."

"You'd have done it," said Dick, "if I hadn't been more afraid of those fellows behind than I was of you. By the way, where are the officials?"

"Up in the office."

"Then I'll be moving."

"All right, but watch yourself. This fence doesn't

afford much protection. Bullets come right in between the bars. Those fellows outside will have a shot at you if they see you move."

Nevertheless Dick dashed for the office at top speed. And he reached it safely in spite of half a dozen shots fired at him from outside the mill yard.

In the main office he found Tom and half a dozen others, including General Manager Zachary.

"Dick!" exclaimed Tom, as the boy dashed in.

He stepped forward and took his brother's hand.

"It's me, all right," said Dick, forgetful of his grammar for the moment.

"But I thought I told you not to come here."

"I know you did, but there was no help for it," and Dick explained.

"And you don't know where Ralph is now?" asked Tom, after his brother had concluded.

"No, but I guess he's safe enough. He could outrun those fellows with half a start, and he had the same chance I did. I guess he went in the other direction."

"Then he'll probably report to Sergeant Jewett at the Schenley House," said Tom. "I'll get the sergeant on the wire."

He moved to a desk phone and presently was talking with Sergeant Jewett. He was back in a minute.

"Ralph's not there," he said.

Dick was alarmed.

"He's certainly had time enough to get there," he declared.

"I'm afraid he's in the hands of the strikers," said Tom gravely. "Sergeant Jewett says one of his men reported seeing a struggle not far from the mill, after which he heard foreign voices raised in jubilation."

"By Jove! It sounds bad," Dick agreed. "I should have stayed and lent Ralph a hand."

"I guess you did all you could, Dick," said Tom. "But if those fellows have got hold of Ralph we've got to do something at once. We—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of President Lang, Vice-President Lovitt, his daughter and Ethel.

"Hello!" said the vice-president. "How did you get back?"

Dick explained, and Tom then added what they feared had happened to Ralph.

"Bad," exclaimed the vice-president.

"Oh, I don't think any harm will come to the boy," said President Lang. "They may hold him prisoner, but they won't hurt him."

"Can't tell, Lang," said the general manager. "Those fellows are in a pretty bad mood. No telling what they will do. As Hazelton here says, we've got to do something at once."

"Question is what?" said the vice-president.

"Well," said Tom, "the way it seems to me is that Sergeant Jewett will have to get busy at once regardless of the size of his force."

"We'll get that boy out safely if we have to raze every foreigner's house in town," declared the general manager grimly. "He's helped us out a lot, and now it's up to us to repay the debt."

"You're right, Zachary," declared President Lang. "What do you suggest?"

"Well," said the general manager, "I'm for going out with a flag of truce and holding a parley. It's possible we'll have to make concessions to secure the lad's release, but if that is necessary then it's up to us to do it."

"You're right, Zachary," declared the vice-president. "I'll go myself."

"I guess I had better do the parleying," Tom put in. "They'll have some respect for my uniform whether they do for the rest of you or not."

"They haven't had much respect for the uniform tonight," declared Dick.

While the others talked over ways and means, Mabel approached Dick and laid a hand on his arm. Ethel stood close.

"Do you think any harm will come to Ralph?" asked Mabel.

"I don't think so," declared Dick reassuringly.

"Oh, I hope not!" Ethel exclaimed.

Dick laughed, though he didn't feel much like it.

"Now, don't you worry about Ralph," he said. "He has a pretty habit of getting himself out of trouble, and he's been in tighter places than this, believe me."

"You're just saying that," declared Ethel.

"Oh, no I'm not," replied Dick. "Besides, they won't dare hurt him. If they did, not one of them would be safe in this town. You must remember their leaders are Americans, and they realize too well what the sentiment of the community would be if harm came to Ralph."

"I certainly hope you're right," Mabel declared.

"I know I'm right," declared Dick positively, though in his heart he was more worried than either of the girls.

He left Mabel and Ethel and crossed the room to where Tom and the general manager were deep in consultation.

"I'm going out with you Hazelton," declared the general manager. "No use of your objecting."

Tom shrugged.

"Have it your own way," he said.

"Let me go along, too, Tom?" said Dick.

"You stay where you are," was Tom's reply. "I don't want to have to bother with you."

"But maybe I can help."

"What could you do? You have no authority to treat with the men.

"No, young man," said Mr. Zachary. "You stay here. You could do no good out there. You might antagonize the men."

Dick, realizing that coaxing was useless, said no more.

"Now," said the general manager, "the question arises as to whether the strikers will respect a white flag."

"I think they will, if they see it," said Tom.

"We can fix that, all right. There's a searchlight upstairs, small, but it will answer the purpose, I believe. The light will make the white flag visible enough. But where's the white flag?"

President Lang produced a white apron belonging to one of the stenographers.

"How's this?" he asked.

"Fine."

The general manager attached it to his cane, and he and Tom moved toward the door.

A moment later the flashlight upstairs was turned on. It lighted a path toward the gate.

Tom and the general manager stepped out.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RALPH A PRISONER.

RALPH, when he was seized by Blount, the agitator, struggled vainly to free himself. But the man held him firmly.

"No you don't," Blount exclaimed. "Ouch!"

For Ralph, kicking suddenly with his left foot, had caught the man on the shin.

Blount shook Ralph savagely.

"We've had enough trouble with you," he said. "I'm going to see that you make no more, nor your friend when they catch him."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched, Blount," said Ralph, ceasing his struggles now that he realized they were useless. "You haven't caught him yet."

"But we will," declared Blount.

"Bet you don't," said Ralph.

Blount growled something unintelligible, then said aloud:

"We've got you anyhow. That will help some."

Several of the foreigners surrounded them and Ralph was marched away.

"Where are you taking me?" the lad demanded of his captor.

"You'll know that soon enough. You're going to be awfully sorry you mixed into something that was none of your business."

"Oh, I guess you are not going to hurt me," declared Ralph. "You've too much sense for that. Why, your life wouldn't be worth a penny in this town."

"Think so, do you? You're liable to change your tune."

"I guess not. Why—"

"Silence!" Blount thundered. "Keep your mouth shut or I'll shut it for you."

The man's tone was so savage that Ralph heeded his advice.

The men walked in the opposite direction from that taken by Dick in his flight, so Ralph had no means of telling whether his chum had escaped or fallen into the hands of the foreigners.

"I'll bet he got away, though," he mused.

After a walk of perhaps ten minutes, Ralph's captors stopped before a small house, detached from its neighbors, and set back probably fifty yards from the street.

"In here?" asked one of the men.

"Yes," replied Blount. "We'll keep him here until I decide what to do with him."

Ralph was led into the house.

The interior was furnished scantily, but showed signs of habitation. Ralph was escorted to a room on the second floor in the rear. Blount entered with him and looked around. There was a single window. Blount looked out.

It was a drop of perhaps twenty feet to the ground.

"This won't do," Blount growled. "How about the attic, Oscar?"

The man called Oscar nodded, and led the way, lighting the hallway and narrow steps to the attic with a small electric flashlight.

Ralph was thrust into the room and the door was closed and locked behind him. He was in total darkness. He heard the footsteps of his captors descending the stairs.

Quickly the lad advanced to the little window through which a faint light streamed. He looked out. It was a long and dangerous drop to the ground.

"Can't risk that unless I want to take a chance on breaking my neck," he told himself.

Groping around in the darkness with his hand he found a chair and sat down.

"Can't do anything till daylight," he said. "Guess I may as well make the best of it."

He made himself as comfortable as possible.

He had been sitting there possibly five minutes when his keen ear caught the sound of voices. For

a moment he could not place them, but then he discovered they came from the floor below.

"Must be awfully thin floor," he muttered.

He got out of his chair, stretched out on the floor and placed his ear to it.

He could hear the voices more distinctly.

"Yes," said a voice he recognized as Blount's, "we're holding him as a hostage."

"But what good will that do?" demanded a second voice. "The mill people don't care anything about him. He's not one of them."

"Maybe not, but he's helped them a lot and they're bound to help him. If we can make them believe he will be harmed, we may be able to make better terms."

"But suppose they don't give in? Then what? Surely you don't intend to harm the boy?"

"Don't I? Wait and see. He and his friend have spoiled all my plans. If I'm beaten I'm going to take it out on him before I flee the town."

"But you can't do that, Blount. You're an American after all."

"I'm not the kind of American you think I am," growled Blount. "Say, why are you defending this boy? He's not a friend of yours, is he?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, let me tell you something," and Blount's voice grew hard. "Don't you interfere with my

plans or it will be the worse for you. Understand?"

"Are you threatening me, Blount?"

"Threatening? No. But I warn you I'll stand for no foolishness from you nor any of the others."

"You don't have to warn me, Blount. You may bulldoze the others, but I tell you right now it won't go with me. I'm with you in this strike and I'm going to stick. Have no uneasiness on that score."

"That's good. Then I'll go out and explain my plans to the committee. We haven't much time. I understand this state police sergeant is scouring the town and swearing in citizens as special officers. That means that if we can't win out before daylight we're through."

"There's no time to lose, that's sure," the other agreed.

"All right. Then you stay here and watch the prisoner. I'm afraid to trust the foreigners with him. They're so angry they might injure him, and if the officials meet our terms I must guarantee to turn him over to them safe. If they don't—well, I'll have my session with him then."

Ralph heard heavy footsteps moving across the floor below, and he knew by the sound that Blount was leaving the room. Then he heard the agitator's voice again.

"Don't forget, O'Rourke," said Blount. "I hold you personally responsible for the prisoner. If he gets away you'll answer to me."

"All right, Blount," said the other.

Ralph heard a door slam. Blount had gone out.

Ralph got to his feet and after some groping about found his chair again. He sat down.

"Nice pleasant sort of a fellow, that, I don't think," he muttered.

He leaned back in his chair and tried to sleep.

It was an hour later, though to Ralph it seemed that he had just closed his eyes, when the lad was aroused by a hand shaking his shoulder.

"Wake up," said a voice.

"Who is it?" asked Ralph, getting to his feet.

"Nobody you know, but I'm a friend all the same," said the voice in the darkness.

But Ralph had recognized the man's voice.

"O'Rourke, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, but how did you know?"

"I heard you speak in labor hall last night. Then I heard your conversation with Blount a little while ago."

"You heard us?"

"Yes. Your voices carried through the floor. You say you're a friend, what do you want?"

"I want to help you out of here. I don't know what success Blount will have in making terms with the mill officials, but since the other Americans have gone to work I've been thinking things out, and I know I'm on the wrong side. I thought maybe if I helped you out, you might put in a word for me."

"Well," said Ralph, "I won't put in a word for you just because you are helping me, but if you really have experienced a change of heart I shall be more than glad to do so."

"I have. I got into this mess through being weak enough to listen to Blount. He's a bad one, take my word for it. If the mill officials turn him down now, it won't do for him to find you here."

"Nor you either, I guess," said Ralph.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of him. He knows that. But it is just as well to be on the safe side."

"If you're going to help me out of here, the sooner we move the better," said Ralph. "He's liable to be back any time, you know."

"That's so. Follow me."

O'Rourke led the way down the narrow stairs to the second floor, where he listened intently.

"All right, I guess," he said.

He preceded Ralph to the first floor and led the way to the front door. He laid a hand on the knob and was about to open it, when he heard footsteps without.

"Quick!" he shouted, and dashed toward the rear of the house.

Ralph followed.

O'Rourke tried the rear door. It was locked. He fumbled for the key, but it had been removed.

O'Rourke flung open a window.

"Jump out!" he cried.

Ralph did not hesitate. He climbed into the sill and jumped out.

O'Rourke prepared to follow him. But before he could mount to the sill, a rough hand fell on his shoulder.

O'Rourke wheeled and looked into the angry face of Blount.

"So!" cried the agitator. "You're a traitor, eh? I was a fool to leave you here."

He drew back his big fist, and struck.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PARLEY.

When Tom and General Manager Zachary left the mill office and advanced across the open, the latter carrying the flag of truce raised on his cane, the strikers, who in the meantime had advanced somewhat closer to the mill, became quiet. At that moment none of the American agitators, whom they looked upon as their leaders, was present, and the aliens did not know just what to do.

A guard opened the gate and Tom and the general manager stepped out. Several foreigners approached them.

"We want to see one of your leaders," said Tom.

The men went back and consulted with the others.

And it was just about this time that Blount, having locked Ralph up, arrived on the scene. The foreigners explained matters to him, and he approached the general manager.

"So you want to make terms, eh?" said Blount.

"We want you to release the boy you are holding prisoner," replied Mr. Zachary. "I suppose you know where he is."

"I've just left him," said Blount.

"And he's safe?" asked Tom anxiously.

"Yes. No harm will come to him if you agree to my terms."

"See here," said the general manager. "Are you running this strike?"

An evil smile crossed the agitator's face.

"You said it, Mr. Manager," he said.

"Let's hear what you want," said Mr. Zachary briefly.

"Our terms are the same as when the men went on strike—a twenty percent increase in wages and a six-hour working day."

"Impossible," said the general manager. "The best I can do is to let the men come back to work on the old basis and submit the demands to arbitration."

"That won't do, Zachary," said Blount. "Remember I hold the whip hand. Unless you agree

to our demands before six o'clock in the morning, I promise you, you will never again see the boy whom I now hold prisoner."

"You can't mean that you will harm him!" ejaculated the general manager.

Again Blount grinned evilly. Tom clenched his fists, but restrained himself from leaping upon the agitator.

"That's just what I mean," Blount declared. "The other officials are at the mill. You can get together and reach a decision in half an hour."

"And that is your last word, Blount?" demanded the general manager.

"It is."

The general manager turned to Tom.

"Well, Hazelton, what do you say?" he asked.

"That's up to you, Mr. Zachary. Of course you don't have to agree to this man's terms unless you want to, but if you don't he is likely to make good his threat. I know his stripe. My duty is not to advise you, but to keep order if I can. But I want to tell you, Blount, that no matter what the decision of the mill officials, if any harm comes to that boy, this world is not big enough to hide you from me."

Blount sneered.

"Talk is cheap," he said.

"Have it your way, but don't forget what I said," replied Tom grimly.

"And you say you'll give us till six o'clock to

reach a decision, Blount?" said the general manager.

"Yes. Not a minute longer."

"Very well. I'll confer with the other officials immediately. At six o'clock I'll let you know our decision."

"All right. And in the meantime, remember, no tricks."

Blount stood looking after them as they walked away.

The general manager was very angry.

"I'd like to get my hands around that fellow's neck," he exclaimed as they walked back toward the mill offices.

"So would I," Tom agreed, "but it would not have been policy to have attacked him now."

"No, and besides, we were bound to respect our flag of truce."

As they re-entered the offices, the others surrounded them eagerly. The general manager led the way to his office, where he motioned the others to seats.

Then he presented Blount's ultimatum.

"But we can't concede all that, Zachary," declared President Lang.

"If you don't," said the general manager, "there is no telling what will happen to that boy."

"Oh, give them what they want, Mr. Lovitt," exclaimed Ethel, who had been an interested listener up to this time.

"I agree with Ethel, papa," said Mabel.

"You girls must be quiet," Mr. Lovitt cautioned them. "This affair is no concern of yours."

He addressed President Lang.

"I'm for giving in, Lang," he said. "I value the life of that boy above all the dollars that are involved in this strike."

"Good for you, Lovitt!" exclaimed the general manager.

"Then there is nothing more to say," said President Lang. "Even if I were opposed, I would be out-voted. But I want you all to understand that I am of your opinion. Zachary, you may tell Blount we agree to his terms and that the strikers may come back upon the basis of their demands."

"And that settles the strike," said the general manager.

"It's too bad," said the vice-president, "but with a life at stake there is no other way out."

At this juncture the door opened to admit Big Jim Henderson.

"What's this I hear about Ralph being captured by the strikers?" he demanded.

"It's true, Big Jim," replied Dick.

"And what are you going to do about it?" Big Jim demanded aggressively, including Tom and all the mill officials in his glance.

As briefly as possible the situation and the decision of the officials was explained to him.

"And you say you're to give your decision to Blount at six o'clock?" demanded Big Jim.

"That's right Henderson," replied President Lang.

Big Jim produced a watch.

"It's not three yet," he said. "Give me two hours and maybe you won't have to accept the terms."

"What are you going to do?" demanded the general manager in surprise.

"I'm going out and have a look for the boy. If I can find him, that will settle the whole business."

"I'll go with you, Big Jim!" cried Dick.

"Good! Glad to have you, young feller."

"And I'll go too," declared the general manager.

But Big Jim shook his head.

"No," he said, "just me and this young feller. We'll go out and bring Ralph back."

And entreaties and coaxing failed to move him. He looked at Dick.

"Ready, young feller?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then let's go."

He walked toward the door. As Dick was about to follow, Mabel stepped forward and held out her hand.

"Good luck," she said quietly.

"Thanks," said Dick, and grasped her hand.

"Hurry back and bring Ralph with you," said

Ethel advancing. "Don't forget you boys have an engagement to take us to the movies tonight."

"And we'll keep it," Dick promised.

He followed Big Jim out the door.

"We'll have to be careful," said the big man as they crossed the open towards the gate. "The armistice is over, you know. We don't have any white flag."

"We'll get through, Big Jim," said Dick quietly.

He patted the revolver that lay in the right hand pocket of his coat.

And they did.

Following the conference between Blount and the general manager, the strikers seemed to have relaxed their vigilance. No one accosted them as they emerged from the steel mill grounds.

"Where to now, Big Jim?" asked Dick.

"We'll go to Blount's house."

"You know where it is?"

"Rather. I used to go home with him occasionally when we worked side-by-side."

"I see. Is it far?"

"Ten minutes' walk."

"And you think Blount is holding Ralph prisoner in his own house?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. It's rather out of the way, and if a man was imprisoned in the attic he'd have quite a time making his escape."

"But I should think Blount would figure that is

the first place a search would be conducted," Dick protested.

"That's probably the way Blount figures we will think. Therefore, he'll figure it's the safest place of all."

"Maybe you're right. But suppose Ralph is not there?"

"Then we'll have to look some place else."

"And suppose Blount is there, too?"

Big Jim smiled grimly.

"Just let me get my hands on Blount once more," he said. "That's all I want. I let him off too easily last time."

"And he may have friends with him," Dick went on.

"Let him. I've a little instrument in my pocket that will take care of them, too."

Dick, his hand on his own revolver, knew exactly what Big Jim meant.

"I'm with you, Big Jim," he said quietly. "If Ralph is there nothing on earth will prevent us from getting him out."

Big Jim looked at the lad approvingly.

"You're made of the right stuff, young feller," he declared. "That's why I brought you along."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BOYS KEEP THEIR ENGAGEMENT.

Big Jim stopped.

"Here's the house," he said. "We'll have to go quietly."

Silently they slipped up to the front door. Big Jim was just about to lay a hand on the knob, when Dick grasped him by the arm.

"What's that?" he exclaimed in a low voice.

They listened.

Sounds of a struggle reached their ears from within.

"Hurry, Big Jim!" cried Dick. "He's doing something to Ralph!"

Big Jim's hand turned the knob, and he bore his weight on the door. But the door was locked and resisted his efforts.

"Stand back!" he said to Dick.

Dick stepped aside.

Big Jim stepped back several paces, then lurched at the door. His strong shoulder caught it heavily and the door burst inward with a crash.

"Come on!" shouted Big Jim and dashed into the house.

It was dark, and Dick stumbled over the threshhold. He recovered his balance in a moment, however, and hurried after Big Jim.

Into a dark room dashed Big Jim, and there, by the faint light that came through the window, he saw two struggling figures. Big Jim advanced to take a hand.

"Strike a light, Dick!" he called over his shoulder.

Dick did so, and glancing around he espied a gas jet. He applied the match and the blaze lighted up the room just at the minute Big Jim laid hands on Blount.

Then, for the first time, Big Jim recognized the agitator's opponent.

"O'Rourke!" he exclaimed, and stepped back.

Blount dropped his hands. So did O'Rourke.

"So, I've got the pair of you," said Big Jim with a queer smile. "I'm glad."

"Hold on, Henderson," expostulated O'Rourke. "You've got me wrong. I let the kid out of here not three minutes ago. That's what Blount and I are fighting about."

"Tell it to the marines," said Big Jim.

"It's true, Henderson. The kid went out this window. I was just about to go along when Blount grabbed me."

Big Jim looked at O'Rourke keenly.

"You may be telling the truth," he said. "I hope so. You're not like Blount, O'Rourke. You al-

ways had a decent streak. But if you're telling the truth now, you won't mind what I do. Dick, get out your gun and cover him."

Dick obeyed.

Then Big Jim advanced toward Blount, who, during this conversation, had been standing, apparently stupefied, where Big Jim had first seized him.

"Now, Blount," said Big Jim, "I'm going to give you the worst thrashing you have ever had. Take off your coat."

Blount started to protest, but Big Jim silenced him with uplifted hand.

"Take off your coat," he repeated.

Big Jim doffed his own coat and hat and laid them on a chair. After another moment's hesitation, Blount did the same.

He took up a position of defense.

"Listen, Henderson," he said, "I was only fooling about that boy."

"That so?" Big Jim asked with a smile. "Well, then, on the same theory, I'm only fooling now; but it's going to hurt you a whole lot. Keep your gun on that other man, young feller," this latter to Dick.

Realizing that he could not escape without a fight, Blount doubled up his fists and suddenly sprang forward, apparently thinking to take Big Jim by surprise.

But Big Jim was ready for him. He did not retreat as he had the night in labor hall. Instead

he took Blount's blow on the head without flinching, and in turn sent Blount reeling with two hard jolts to the chin and ear.

Blount came back gamely and succeeded in clinching. In vain Big Jim tried to shake him off. The other stuck like a leach.

Suddenly, as they reeled around the room, Blount released his hold, and before Big Jim realized what was up, dashed across the floor and leaped out the open window.

With a cry Big Jim was after him.

Dick, forgetting for the moment that he was to guard O'Rourke, also sprang forward. O'Rourke hurried after him.

And then all drew back in amazement.

Big Jim chuckled.

Outside and almost directly beneath the window stood the agitator, Blount. His hands were raised high in the air and he was the picture of depression.

Standing directly in front of Blount, a revolver levelled in a steady hand, was Ralph.

Big Jim, as soon as he could recover from his surprise, stepped forward.

"Might have known you'd get in at the finish somehow," he chuckled. "You can put up your gun now. I guess Blount won't try to get away again."

Dick and Ralph shook hands.

"I was afraid he'd hurt you," said the former.

"So was I, for awhile," replied Ralph. "And I don't know what he might have done if it hadn't been for O'Rourke, here."

"So O'Rourke was telling the truth, eh?" said Big Jim.

"What do you mean?" asked Ralph.

"He said he helped you escape, but I wasn't sure about it."

"Well, he did."

"I'm glad to hear it. There is some hope for him yet. You can go now, if you wish, O'Rourke."

"And I won't forget my promise to put in a word for you," said Ralph. "Thanks."

O'Rourke walked away in the darkness.

"What are you going to do with Blount, Big Jim?" asked Dick.

"I'm going to turn him over to Sergeant Jewett if I can find him."

"He's at the Schenley House," said Ralph.

"Then we'll go there."

They found Sergeant Jewett and turned Blount over to him. The sergeant immediately took him to the police station for safekeeping.

"How is your citizen army coming?" Big Jim asked of the sergeant upon the latter's return.

"Fine. I've sworn in two hundred men. We'll mass here at daylight and move on the mill."

"To tell you the truth, sergeant," said Big Jim, "I don't think that will be necessary."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean that as soon as word of Blount's capture gets around I've an idea the strikers will sue for peace."

"Perhaps so, but I'm not going to take any chances. I'm going to move on the mill at daylight."

"And what are we going to do the rest of the night—or I should say, morning?" asked Ralph.

"We'll go back to the mill," said Dick.

"I guess it will be safe," Big Jim agreed. "I don't believe we'll be troubled before six o'clock, the hour the general manager was to have given his decision to Blount."

"And by that time I'll have my men around the plant," said Sergeant Jewett.

As Big Jim had predicted, no hand was raised against them as they returned to the mill. The foreign strikers were still much in evidence, but for some reason their warlike spirit seemed to have gone. Dick commented upon it.

"Plain enough," said Big Jim. "They're getting tired. They've been out here all night, and most of 'em would like to get to bed."

"Wouldn't be surprised if that did have something to do with it," agreed Ralph.

The return to the mill was the signal for much rejoicing. Ralph's hand was warmly shaken by the officials, and many of the men outside the building.

Once more the general manager called a consultation.

"We'll sit tight now," said President Lang. "We have nothing further to fear. I've no doubt a committee will call on us tomorrow and ask for peace."

And, as it developed, the president was right.

But, in spite of the fact that officials and American workmen in the mill now anticipated no further trouble from the strikers, no one ventured to leave the mill before daylight.

True to his word, Sergeant Jewett and the men he had sworn in as special officers, moved toward the mill at daylight. Such foreigners as had not already returned to their homes, fled at their approach.

But still those who had spent the night in the mill remained.

At eight o'clock the strike leaders sent a delegation to confer with the officials. For awhile they held out for their original demands, but to these President Lang and the others turned a deaf ear.

"Come back on the old basis or not at all," was the dictum of the steel officials.

And to this the committee finally agreed, announcing that the men would report for work the following day.

"And so ends the steel strike so far as Wilmercairn is concerned," said Dick, who, with Ralph, had remained for the final conference.

President Lang overheard the lad's remark.

"Thanks to you boys," he said. "Believe me, you've done more than any of the officials in bringing this strike to a peaceful settlement."

"We're glad to have been of service, sir," said Ralph.

"Hazelton," said the general manager to Dick, "don't forget that that job is still open for you whenever you want it."

"Thank you, sir," laughed Dick. "I'm liable to be around and remind you of it some day."

Dick and Ralph shook hands all around and with Tom left the mill.

"Don't forget we have an engagement tonight, Ralph," said Dick.

"No chance, Dick. Ethel reminded me of it just before Mr. Lovitt took her and Mabel home."

"Guess you wouldn't have forgotten it anyhow," said Dick with a grin."

"Well, I've got nothing on you," Ralph grinned back at him.

They accompanied Tom to the emergency barracks, where they bade him goodbye.

"We'll probably be kept here for several days," said Tom, referring to the troopers, "but I may not get to see you before I leave, so we'll say goodbye now."

They shook hands.

"How long do you boys intend to remain here?" asked Tom, as the lads started away.

"Hard to say," said Dick with a grin. "You see we're rather interested in this mill."

"And you are rather interested in the daughter of one of the mill officials," said Tom. "I see."

The boys went home, where Ralph's Aunt Mary expressed her delight at having them return safely.

The boys slept until almost time for dinner. After a hearty meal, they picked up their caps and started to leave the house.

"What! Going out again tonight?" asked Aunt Mary.

"Yes, aunt," was Ralph's reply. "But it's a social engagement this time."

Aunt Mary smiled.

"Have a good time," she called after them.

The girls were ready and waiting when the boys arrived.

"Mabel," said Dick, "we've come to keep that engagement."

"That's right," said Ralph.

"Well, Ethel and I are very glad that you got here," declared Mabel. "From the trouble you boys always seem to be in, we weren't sure you would come."

"It would have taken more than a steel strike to keep us away tonight," Dick assured her.

"You said it, Dick," declared Ralph. "Come on, folks, let's go."

Arm in arm, the four started off down the street.

The further adventures of Dick and Ralph will be found in a fourth volume of this series, entitled "THE BOY TROOPERS AMONG THE WILD MOUNTAINEERS; or, Enforcing the Law in West Virginia."

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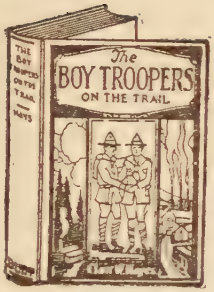

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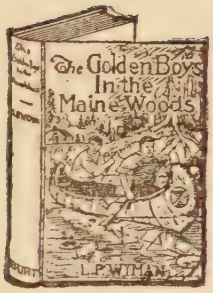

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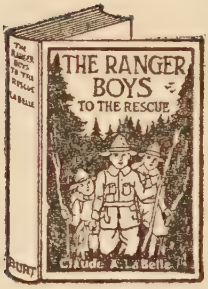

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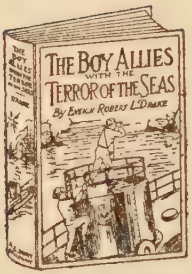

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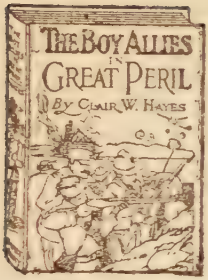

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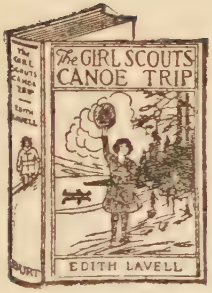

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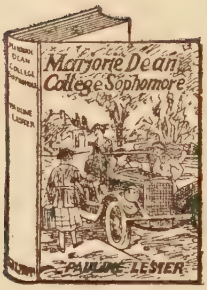

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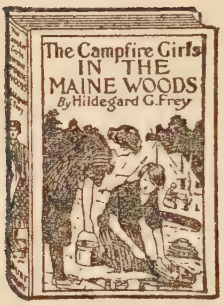

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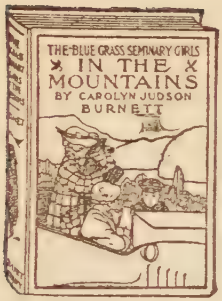

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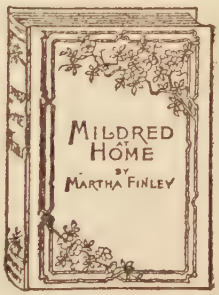

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